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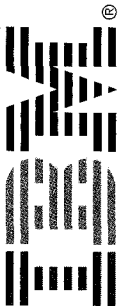
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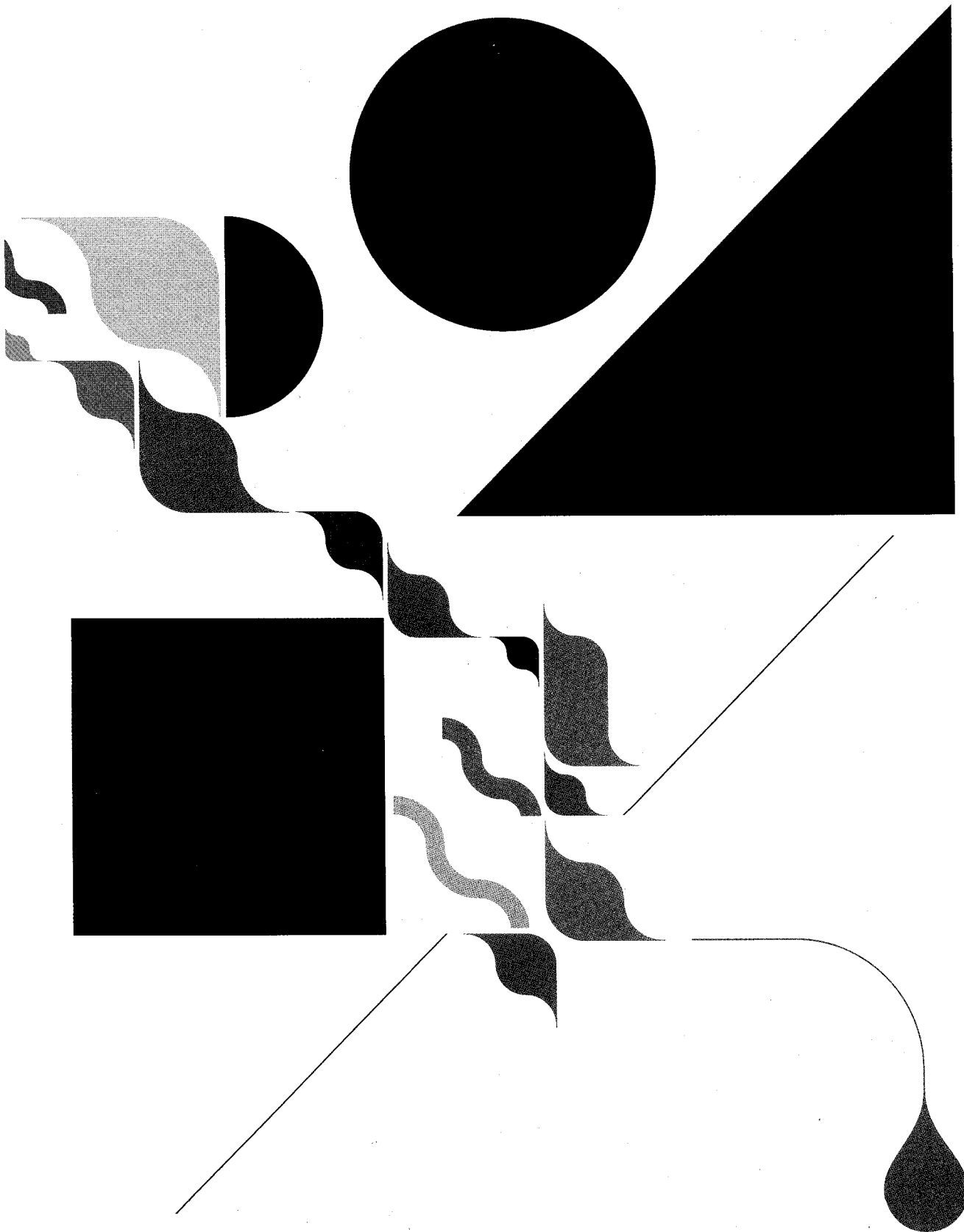
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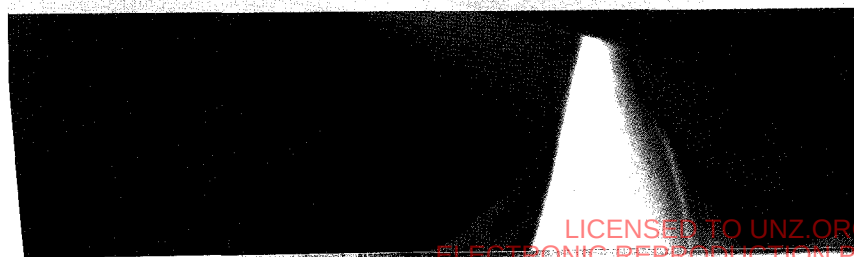
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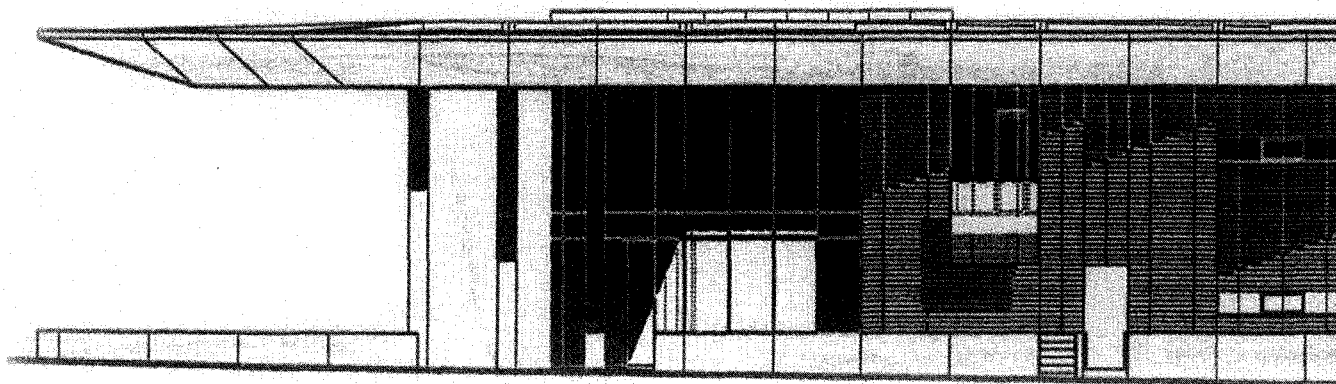


SOMEDAY, BY RICHARD MEIER

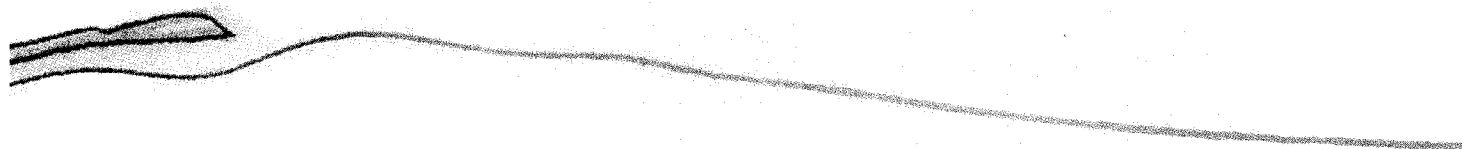
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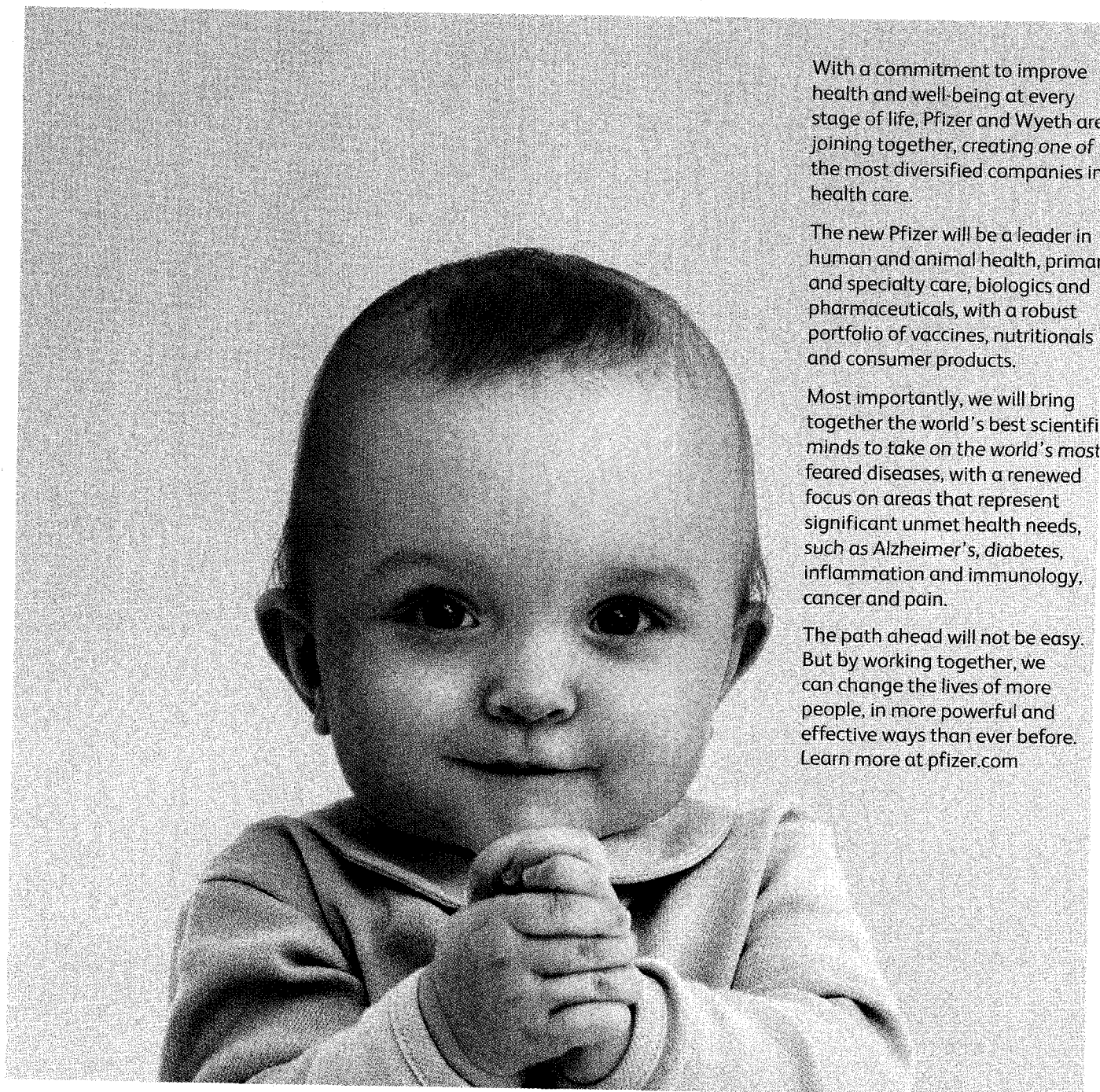
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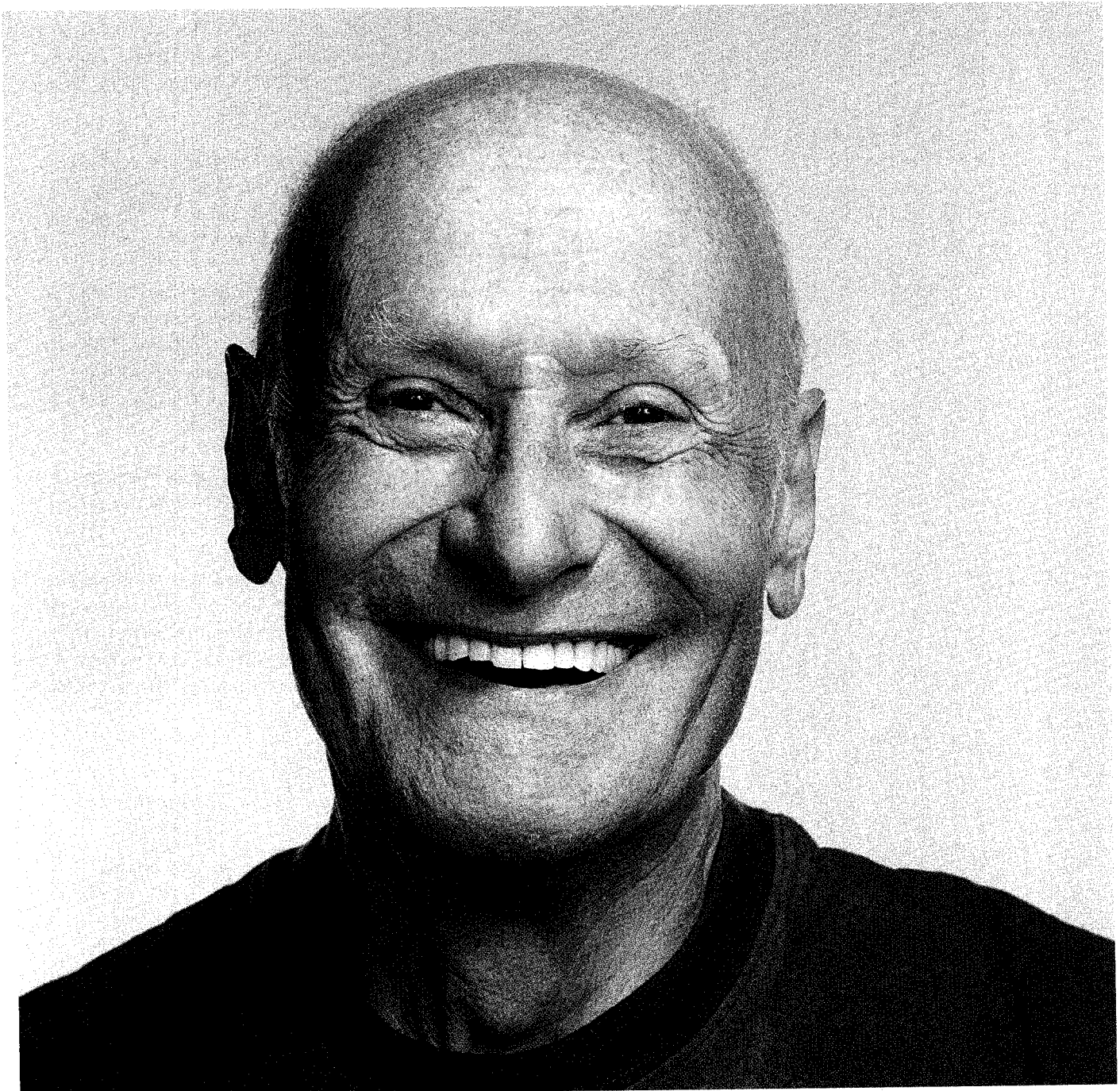
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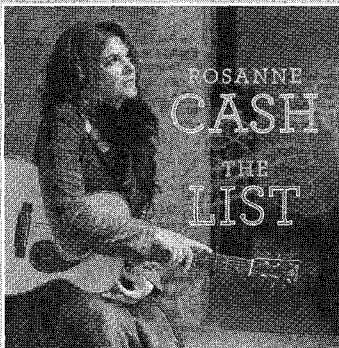


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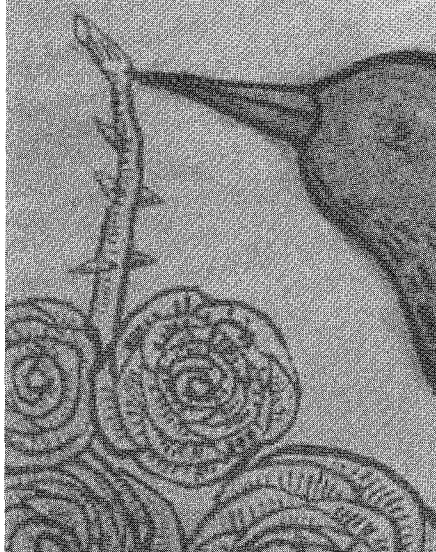


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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Mayer ("The Predator War," p. 36) received this year's New York Public Library Helen Bernstein Award for Excellence in Journalism for "The Dark Side," which is available in paperback.

Steve Coll (Comment, p. 31), the president of the New America Foundation, won a Pulitzer Prize in 2005 for his book "Ghost Wars," about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan.

Tad Friend (The Talk of the Town, p. 34) is a staff writer and the author of "Cheerful Money," a family memoir, which came out in September.

Christine Kenneally ("The Inferno," p. 46) writes about science and cognition. "The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language" was published in 2007.

Maureen N. McLane (Poem, p. 60) is the author of the poetry collections "Same Life" and "World Enough," which is due out in June.

Gahan Wilson (Sketchbook, p. 63), a cartoonist, has been contributing to the magazine since 1976. He has published more than twenty books of cartoons, two novels, and a short-story collection. "Gahan Wilson: 50 Years of *Playboy* Cartoons" will come out in December.

Dana Goodyear ("Man of Extremes," p. 54) is a staff writer.

Peter Hessler ("Chinese Barbizon," p. 68) will publish his third book, "Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory," in February.

Michael Longley (Poem, p. 75) was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2001. "Collected Poems" is his most recent book.

Jonathan Lethem (Fiction, p. 78) is the author of eight novels, including "The Fortress of Solitude" and "Chronic City," which has just been published.

John Lahr (A Critic at Large, p. 88; The Theatre, p. 96) is working on a biography of Tennessee Williams. The play "Prick Up Your Ears," inspired by his biography of Joe Orton, is currently running in London's West End.

Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 84) writes the pop-music column for the magazine.

John Cuneo (Cover) is an illustrator whose work has appeared in several magazines, including *Esquire* and *The Atlantic*. "nEuROTIC," a compilation of sketchbook drawings, was published in 2006.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Blog posts, photographs, audio, and video from the tenth New Yorker Festival. / A live chat with *Dana Goodyear* about James Cameron and "Avatar." / Slide show: *Peter Hessler* on the artists of Lishui. / The New Yorker Out Loud: *Sasha Frere-Jones* on the state of hip-hop, plus a video of Freddie Gibbs. / More video: A new Finger Painting by *Jorge Colombo*; *Richard Brody's* DVD of the Week. / Blogs: *George Packer* in Berlin, *Evan Osnos* in Beijing, *Macy Halford* and *Thessaly La Force* on the Book Bench, and much more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

BUILDING BIOLOGY

Michael Specter poses a provocative question: "Where will synthetic biology lead us?" ("A Life of Its Own," September 28th). The scientists interviewed paint a rosy picture of a future world where even our progeny are engineered to specification. But scientific aspirations are often dampened by public opinion (as when European consumers rejected genetically engineered foods). A recent national survey conducted by the Woodrow Wilson Center indicated that the path from lab to novel life forms would likely be a controversial one. More than half of the survey respondents were concerned about the broader implications of synthetic biology (one person said it "scares the bejeezus out of me"); two-thirds wanted the research regulated closely by the government; and ninety per cent thought that more should be done to inform the public about synthetic biology. Where the science leads may depend heavily on whether scientists are capable of having an honest conversation with the public about what they are doing and why.

David Rejeski

*Director, Synthetic Biology Project
Woodrow Wilson International Center
for Scholars
Washington, D.C.*

The term "synthetic biology" suggests that engineers are synthesizing life from non-living matter. But, in reality, they are combining and altering substances that have been derived from living organisms and then inserting the novel construct back into organisms to effect particular changes. This has nothing to do with synthesizing life. Synthetic biology is a form of genetic engineering, and always presupposes the functional living organism. Without the ability of the organism to take up, integrate, and express the lab-made construct, there would be no synthetic biology.

Craig Holdrege

*Director, The Nature Institute
Ghent, N.Y.*

Both genetic engineering and synthetic biology are often discussed in terms of the

fantastic rather than the feasible, which has made it difficult—particularly for the public—to distinguish between plausible risks and those which are outlandish. In the case of synthetic biology, creating designer children is in some extraordinarily distant future. However, synthetic biology involving bacteria and viruses will become a reality in the near future—and a serious concern, though not an easy one to deal with. As Specter points out, it is becoming increasingly simple and cheap to synthesize DNA. What we ought to remember, however, is that there are plenty of existing pathogens that are nasty enough to cause disruption or something even more catastrophic, so there may in fact be little motivation for a bioterrorist to face the difficulties of genetically engineering or synthesizing a super-virulent pathogen, when what's out there is already bad enough.

*Mark Tepfer
Venice, Italy*

ON TRIAL

Adam Gopnik writes of Theodore Herzl that the Dreyfus trial was the "moment" that "engraved his sense that the Jews could never find a safe home in Europe" (Books, September 28th). In his recent book "Herzl," the Hebrew University professor Shlomo Avineri offers a different account. He notes that Herzl initially believed that Dreyfus was guilty, that his journals covering the years from 1895 to 1904 barely mention Dreyfus, and that Herzl's initial reports of Dreyfus's court-martial emphasized French anti-German xenophobia. Avineri suggests that it was the ascendancy of anti-Semitism in Germany, Eastern Europe, and Russia that led Herzl to look for a haven for Europe's Jews.

*Aaron Manson
New York City*

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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25	26	27	21	22	23	24

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE THREE SISTERS

Galway's Druid Theatre, which has produced such darkly offbeat shows as Enda Walsh's "Disco Pigs" and "The Walworth Farce," now presents Walsh's "The New Electric Ballroom," about the not so faded memories of three Irish sisters, at St. Ann's Warehouse. (See page 16.)

NIGHT LIFE MACHINE AGE

Florence Welch, who records as Florence and the Machine, is an artsy

young London-born singer whose ethereal vocals and enchantingly produced songs contain echoes of Beth Orton. Her first album, "Lungs," gets its Stateside release this week, and she makes her New York City debut at the Bowery Ballroom. (See page 18.)

ART WAR FARE

"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156–1868," at the Met, traces the aesthetic achievement of Japan's warrior elite with more than two hundred objects, from elaborate swords and

helmets to screens and scrolls portraying battle scenes. (See page 19.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC SHANGHAI SURPRISE

When the Isaac Stern documentary "From Mao to Mozart" was released, in 1980, China was a classical-music backwater; now its musicians and composers rank among the world's finest. Carnegie Hall celebrates their achievements—as well as China's rich folk-music heritage—in a three-week festival (held in venues across the city) that opens this week. (See pages 19, 21, 22, and 24.)

MOVIES PURR-VIEW

A diverse array of movies is being screened as part of the inaugural New York Cat Art Film Festival, at Anthology Film Archives, including a quartet of films by Stan Brakhage; "The Private Life of a Cat," by Alexander Hammid and Maya Deren; a video by Tracey Emin; Chris Marker's essay film "The Case of the Grinning Cat"; and, of course, Blake Edwards's "The Pink Panther." (See page 27.)

Naomi Shelton and the Gospel Queens, at Fat Cat. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK ROCK THE BELLS

In 2008, Derek Miller was looking for a woman to sing the danceable songs he'd been writing since leaving the successful hardcore band Poison the Well. One night, while working at a Brazilian restaurant, he waited on a woman and her daughter.



When the subject of Miller's search for a vocalist came up, the mother nominated her daughter, Alexis Krauss, a schoolteacher who spent most of her teen years singing on pop records. A few weeks later, the two had become a duo called Sleigh Bells. After three shows, I've heard audience members compare them to T. Rex, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, and Run-DMC; Miller's songs are models of elemental spritz, short on filigree and moody bits. Onstage, he lets Krauss take over. She's part Bettie Page, part M.I.A., hair unbound and voice unchecked. Right now, Sleigh Bells' shows involve one iPod, one loud guitar, and two people. It is hard to imagine anything stopping them, unless they do something perverse like hire a band. They have shows at Santos Party House and Public Assembly (both Oct. 21) and the Market Hotel (Oct. 23).

—Sasha Frere-Jones

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AFTER MISS JULIE

Sienna Miller stars in Patrick Marber's adaptation of Strindberg's play from 1888, about an upper-class girl who preys on a servant at her father's country estate. Marin Ireland and Jonny Lee Miller also star; Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 22. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

AVENUE Q

After a six-year run on Broadway, the arch puppet comedy relocates to New World Stages. Opens Oct. 21. (340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS

Tarell Alvin McCraney premieres a trilogy of stories centered around an extended family living in the bayou. Produced in association with McCarter Theatre. Tina Landau directs "Part 1: In the Red and Brown Water"; Robert O'Hara directs "Part 2: The Brothers Size" and "Marcus; or the Secret of Sweet." In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

FELA!

Bill T. Jones directs and choreographed this musical about Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the politically active musician who pioneered Afro-beat. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones; music performed onstage by members of Antibalas. In previews. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

FINIAN'S RAINBOW

The "Encores!" production of the 1947 musical, involving an Irishman and his daughter, who travel to America to bury a pot of gold, has been expanded for Broadway. Jim Norton, Kate Baldwin, Cheyenne Jackson, and Christopher Fitzgerald star; with music by Burton Lane, a book by Yip Harburg and Fred Saidy, and lyrics by Harburg. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

IDIOT SAVANT

Willem Dafoe stars in the world premiere of an avant-garde philosophical comedy written and directed by Richard Foreman, presented in association with Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. Previews begin Oct. 27. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY

Les Waters directs Sarah Ruhl's Broadway debut, a comedy about marriage, starring Laura Benanti and Michael Cerveris. Previews begin Oct. 22. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

LOVE CHILD

A play written and performed by Daniel Jenkins and Robert Stanton, directed by Carl Forsman, in which the actors portray actors performing a play on opening night, and interact with the audience. Previews begin Oct. 23. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

MADE IN HEAVEN

Jay Bernzweig wrote this comedy, in which conjoined twins propose to their mutual girlfriend. Andrew Shaifer directs, at SoHo Playhouse. Previews begin Oct. 22. (15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

THE NEIL SIMON PLAYS:

BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS

David Cromer directs Simon's 1983 play, starring Laurie Metcalf and Dennis Boutsikaris. In previews. Opens Oct. 25. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

THE NEW ELECTRIC BALLROOM

Druid Theatre performs a play by Enda Walsh, about three Irish sisters who obsess over a rock singer they met in the nineteen-sixties. Previews begin Oct. 27. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

NIGHTINGALE

Manhattan Theatre Club presents this play written and performed by Lynn Redgrave, about her grandmother Beatrice. Joseph Hardy directs. In previews. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ORDINARY DAYS

Roundabout Underground presents a new musical by Adam Gwon, directed by Marc Bruni, about the intertwining lives of four New Yorkers. In previews. Opens Oct. 25. (111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

RAGTIME

Marcia Milgrom Dodge directs and choreographs the musical based on the book by E. L. Doctorow, about life in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. With a book by Terrence McNally and music and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty. Previews begin Oct. 23. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.)

THE STARRY MESSENGER

Kenneth Lonergan wrote and directs this drama for the New Group, starring Matthew Broderick, as a divorced planetarium teacher, and Catalina Sandino Moreno ("Maria Full of Grace"), as the single mother he falls in love with. Previews begin Oct. 24. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE UNDERSTUDY

Scott Ellis directs the New York premiere of Theresa Rebeck's new backstage comedy, starring Julie White, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, and Justin Kirk. Presented by Roundabout Theatre Company. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WHAT ONCE WE FELT

A new play by Ann Marie Healy, presented by LCT3, directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, about the author of the last novel ever printed. Previews begin Oct. 26. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

NOW PLAYING

BYE BYE BIRDIE

Robert Longbottom directs and choreographs the 1960 musical. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION

Annie Baker's latest play is about five amateur actors taking part in a class of theatre games over a period of a few weeks. Through their minimal exchanges and their improvisational role-playing, Baker seems to think she is revealing subtext; what's really on display is glibness. The aimless show doesn't build or flow but trickles out in a facile and wearying jokiness. The revelations of character, when they are finally served up, are imposed, not earned. The trope of an acting class is potentially fascinating material; but even a solid cast, especially Tracee Chimo, who plays the sullen teenager among the confused adults, can't save this evening from its suffocating smugness. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

COUNTY OF KINGS

Lemon Andersen wrote and performs a one-man show. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

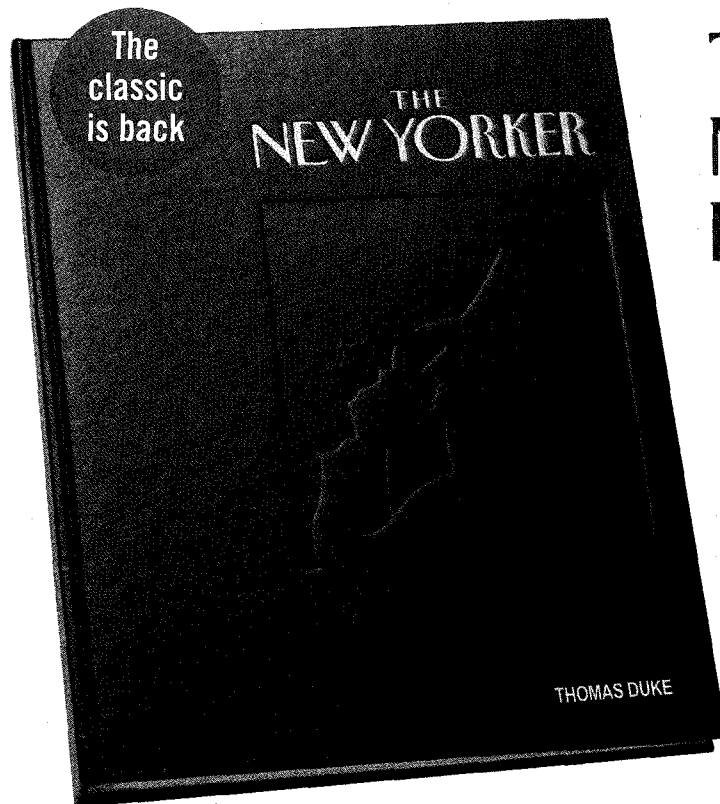
HAMLET

In Michael Grandage's barn-burning "Hamlet," imported from London's Donmar Warehouse, Jude Law has a sharp critical intelligence. But, no matter how expert his technique or how potent his charisma, it's impossible to conceive of him as "pigeon-liver'd" or lacking in "gall." This Hamlet is essentially heroic: for Law, there is no issue between being and seeming. He never goes over the edge—or even up to it. All protestations to the contrary, he is on top of everything, a posture that mutes the play's dark humor. Grandage's swash-buckling attack is meant for a mass audience, not for the reading room. If his interpretation lacks depth, the clear, strong melodramatic line of the plot still keeps the audience on an emotional roller coaster. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/19/09.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

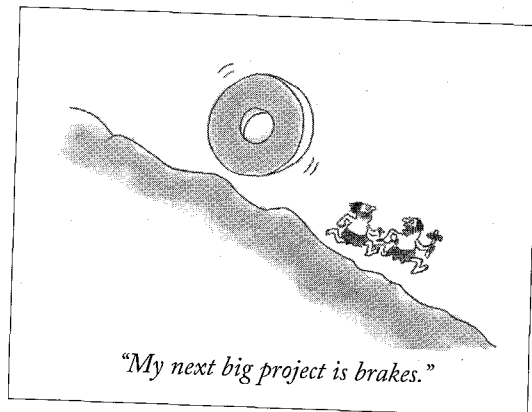
LET ME DOWN EASY

In the brilliant tracery of her one-woman shows, Anna Deavere Smith listens, watches, records, then acts out both the verbatim testimony and the telltale evasions of each of her many subjects' syntax. Out of this vaudeville of observations—her judgment lies in the juxtaposition—she creates a vivid collaged world. Her newest work

NATHAN FOX



THE 2010 NEW YORKER DESK DIARY



Sam Gross

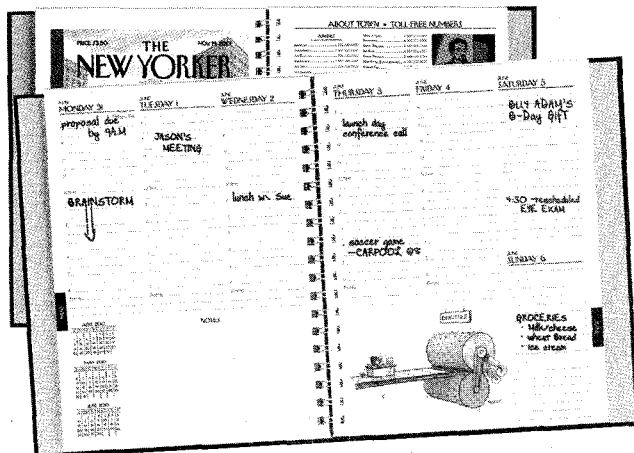
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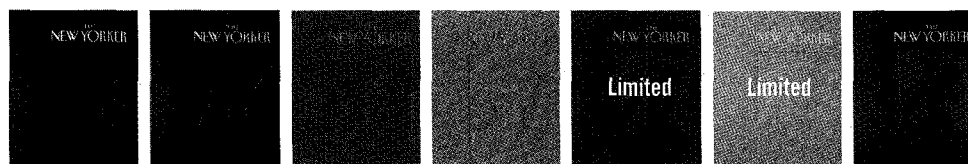
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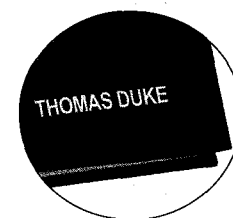
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(well directed by Leonard Foglia) is an inquiry not into a big public event but into a big spiritual one: how we die. It has a terrific cumulative impact. She looks at everything from wounded machismo (a maimed bull rider, a boxer battered into a four-day coma) to the people who tend those wounds. Smith is doing more than opening up a much needed discussion about the dying and those who minister to them. The purpose of the enterprise, we realize, is for the playwright herself to learn how to die. It's bracing, poetic stuff. (10/19/09) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

MEMPHIS

For this new musical about the birth of rock and roll, Joe DiPietro wrote the book and lyrics, and David Bryan wrote the music and lyrics. Christopher Ashley directs. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE NIGHT WATCHER

The monologist Charlayne Woodard has no children of her own, but children abound in her life: she is an aunt, a godmother, and, to many of her friends' kids, a mentor. Her sometimes uneasy status as a not quite parent is the subject of this evening of vignettes, which Woodard enacts with openhearted zest. A high-wattage performer, Woodard nevertheless runs into trouble: by recounting one successful intervention into a young life after another, she appears to be implicitly disparaging her friends'—and, by extension, the black community's—parenting skills. But the show seems less a social critique than a platform for Woodard to be applauded for her personal virtue. Daniel Sullivan ("Twelfth Night") directs. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

OLEANNA

David Mamet's 1992 play—which premiered soon after the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings—involves a fragile, arrogant professor, John (Bill Pullman), and his unsmiling student Carol (Julia Stiles), who comes to John's office to discuss her grade. Through Mamet's customary rapid-fire dialogue, constructed almost entirely of phrases and fragments, Carol challenges John's vague academic semantics as elite and impenetrable; John admits that he had to overcome his belief that he was stupid. John will give Carol an "A," if only she'll come back for more private talks. Carol files a sexual-harassment report against John, and as his bewilderment and anger grow, her accusations become increasingly incendiary. As directed by Doug Hughes, the complete lack of sexual tension between Pullman and Stiles renders Carol's accusations hysterical and unfounded, and reduces what could have been a nuanced, credible power struggle to an unfair fight between an inexplicably vindictive she-monster and a pitiful man. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

In J. M. Synge's comedy (presented by the Pearl Theatre Company at their new home at City Center), when a young stranger named Christy Mahon (Sean McNall) wanders into a rural Irish bar late one night and tells the story of how he bludgeoned his father to death while they were farming spuds, a group of locals, including the unmarried barmaid Pegen Mike (Lee Stark), are overcome with excitement: it's been a long time since they've been in the presence of someone so brave and decisive. That morning, Mahon is the town hero, and every woman wants him. That afternoon, though, when Mahon's father (Joe Kady) arrives, wounded and enraged, the situation shifts. In 1907, when this play was first performed, Dublin audiences, feeling dissed, were furious. This production, directed by J. R. Sullivan, though ably acted, is hardly more distinguished than a college play, and now seems merely innocuous. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

Also Playing

BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL: Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **A BOY AND HIS SOUL:** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. **BROKE-OLY:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN**

TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL: Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **THE ROYAL FAMILY:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **A STEADY RAIN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **STILL LIFE:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. **SUPERIOR DONUTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **TWO UNRELATED PLAYS BY DAVID MAMET:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **VIGIL:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **WISHFUL DRINKING:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 23: Bobby Brown. Not to be outdone by the comeback of his more famous ex, Whitney Houston, the R. & B. singer is mounting his own return to the limelight. Hoping fans will remember him for his roots in New Edition and his heyday in the era of New Jack Swing (and not for his multiple arrests and bizarre behavior), Brown will doubtless revisit the hits that put him on the map, notably "Every Little Step" and, of course, "My Prerogative."

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 27: The compelling sounds of the up-and-coming act *Flurence and the Machine*.

CITY WINERY

155 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—Oct. 21-23: The legendary singer-songwriter *Richard Thompson* looks back on his career with a series of all-request shows.

CMJ MUSIC MARATHON

With the record business in a state of cardiopulmonary arrest, this year's citywide festival of indie music continues to showcase a D.I.Y. alternative. Seminars on quitting your day job or running your own label dot the panel schedule, and the living performance-art project Andrew W.K. is a featured speaker. The timeless message is that despite the state of the business exciting bands will continue to form. Promising newcomers like Bear Hands and Sharon Van Etten are present, along with Ted Leo and Busta Rhymes. Many of the clubs around town are devoted to CMJ showcases Oct. 20-24. For a complete schedule, visit www.cmj.com/marathon.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 21: Saul Williams had already won acclaim for his work as an actor, a poet, and an unconventional hip-hop m.c. by the time he recorded his 2007 album with Trent Reznor, "The Inevitable Rise and Liberation of Niggy Tardust!," but the collaboration finally put his name into heavy rotation. Between Williams's incendiary, politically charged lyrical style and Reznor's bombastic production, the album is a weighty hybrid of rock, rap, and hip-hop.

GALAPAGOS

16 Main St., at Water St, Brooklyn (718-222-8500)—Oct. 25: The imaginative group *Barbez*, which brings to life the slightly mystical compositions of its founder, Dan Kaufman (who is an occasional contributor to this magazine), turns its theremin-infused attention to Kaufman's latest pieces, which are based on Jewish melodies from ancient Rome.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Oct. 26: La Roux, the electro-pop heirs to Yaz.

THE MARKET HOTEL

1142 Myrtle Ave., at Broadway, Brooklyn (No phone)—Oct. 23: The danceable local duo *Sleigh Bells*.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Oct. 27: If Ron Jeremy and Britney Spears had a baby, he would probably grow up to be something like *Har Mar Superstar*, the chubby R. & B. pop diva. Born Sean Tillmann (and also known as Sean Na Na), Har Mar brings dance music to the club as only a scantily clad overweight white guy can. "Tall Boy," a song praising sixteen-ounce cans of beer, from his new album "Dark Touches," was allegedly written for Spears, but when it did not make the cut he recorded it himself with help from her producer, Greg Kurstin. Your ears won't believe your eyes—Har Mar's glisteningly produced, booty-shaking music is actually good.

92Y TRIBECA

200 Hudson St., at Canal St. (212-601-1000)—Tim Rutili, the principal songwriter and singer for the brilliant sonic draftsmen in *Califone*, has never let himself get lazy. In addition to his work in the groups Red Red Meat and Ugly Casanova, this Columbia alum has created a slew of videos, documentaries, and experimental films over the past twenty-odd years. His latest endeavor with *Califone* is an album to accompany his first feature film. The movie and the record share the same title, "All My Friends Are Funeral Singers." On Oct. 23, the band will perform the inspired soundtrack in its entirety, and the film will be screened.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE

Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Oct. 22: Fronted by the imposing Peter Steele (the singer and bass player looms above most, at six foot six), New York's austere *Type O Negative* returns for a home-town show. Renowned for being one of the first ensembles to bridge the gap between heavy metal and gothic rock, *Type O Negative* remains revered by fans of excessively loud and dark music.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Oct. 24: Crystalline Icelandic glitch pop may be a bit clichéd at this point, but no one makes it sound as natural as the elfin sprites in *Múm*. They've travelled to New York to whisper through a set of tunes from their latest record, "Sing Along to Songs You Don't Know." If you can see through the veil of pixie dust, it should prove to be a rewarding set of fragile, contemplative songs.

PUBLIC ASSEMBLY

70 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-384-4586)—Oct. 21: *Sleigh Bells* (see the Market Hotel).

ROCKS OFF CONCERT CRUISE

Oct. 24: This curiously buoyant music series, which is in its ninth season, presents *Pig Destroyer* for a night of extreme and uncompromising music. These luminaries of "grindcore" (an obdurate and raw form of metal that condenses drum blasts and guttural screams into micro-compositions that generally clock in at less than thirty seconds) have a sound that may not be appropriate for, say, women in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy or people with uncontrolled hypertension. But for the initiated, their songs prove that speed, discordance, and brevity can transcend pop music, becoming something else entirely. (For more information, visit www.rocksoff.com.)

SANTOS PARTY HOUSE

96 Lafayette St. (212-584-5492)—Oct. 21: *Sleigh Bells* (see the Market Hotel).

THE STONE

Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Oct. 23: The composer and percussionist Susie Ibarra, whose parents hail from Manila, has made her mark on the avant, jazz, and experimental scenes playing with the likes of John Zorn, William Parker, and Sylvie Courvoisier. With her husband and fellow downtown percussionist Roberto Rodriguez, she has a Filipino trip-hop project called *Electric Kulintang*. Ibarra plays the *kulintang* (an eight-gong instrument from the southern Philippines that also lends its name to a style of folk music), keyboards, and other instruments. Rodriguez contributes electronic effects (including field recordings from their travels in the Philippines) and percussion. This

performance will feature a piece called "War Horses," which includes the sampled poetry and the recorded voice of the African-American poet and Vietnam War veteran Yusef Komunyakaa.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Oct. 23: The thirty-member New York Arabic Orchestra, directed by Bassam Saba. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Oct. 24: The pi-pa virtuoso Wu Man curates and hosts a night of traditional Chinese music, with the Li Family Daoist Band and the Zhang Family Band. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. For more information about both shows, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 20-24: Phil Woods's longevity as a major bop-based saxophone stylist is as impressive as the survival of his longtime quintet, which includes the pianist Bill Mays and the trumpeter Brian Lynch.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 20-25: The Dizzy Gillespie Alumni All-Stars aren't exactly a group filled to the brim with veterans of the bop giant's ensembles, but key players, including the veteran saxophonist James Moody and the younger trumpeter Roy Hargrove, work hard to honor its namesake. The guest soloists are Jimmy Heath (on Oct. 20-21), Antonio Hart (Oct. 23-24), and Terrell Stafford (Oct. 25).

CAFÉ SABARSKY

Neue Galerie, Fifth Ave. at 86th St. (212-628-6200, ext. 485)—Oct. 22: The German vocalist Theo Bleckmann, who blends cabaret with experimental jazz, gets backing from the pianist Rob Schummer and a string quartet for a program of songs by Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, and others covering the ground from mid-twentieth-century Berlin to present-day Las Vegas.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 20-21: The Ali Jackson band. A rousing drummer best known for his association with Wynton Marsalis, Jackson leads his own quintet with the trumpeter Ryan Kisor and the saxophonist Craig Handy in the front line. Oct. 22-25: Stefon Harris and Blackout. As is apparent from his new album, "Urbanus," Harris, the standout vibraphonist of his generation, uses this band to investigate the funk and hip-hop influences that he shies away from when appearing with more straitlaced jazz ensembles.

FAT CAT

75 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. S. (212-675-6056)—Jazz combos play this pool hall nightly, but Fridays belong to the soulful singer Naomi Shelton and the Gospel Queens.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 22-25: "Jacofest." In his compressed career as a leader, the influential electric bassist Jaco Pastorius (1951-87) exhibited a fondness for large ensembles. This super-sized tribute includes Victor Bailey, the fine bassist who replaced Pastorius in the fusion group Weather Report.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

The funky blend of hard bop and rhythm and blues that characterized soul jazz of the nineteen-fifties and sixties takes the spotlight when the saxophonist Wes Anderson channels Cannonball Adderley, and the drummer Kenny Washington pays tribute to Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and Horace Silver. Benny Green, Nnenna Freelon, Nicholas Payton, Terrell Stafford, and others will be on hand. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500. Oct. 22-24.)

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 21-25: The saxophonist Joshua Redman needs little more than the interactive support of a bassist and a drummer (here, they are Matt Penman and Gregory Hutchinson, respectively) to produce compelling improvisations that respect tradition while peering beyond it.

SMALLS

183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Oct. 21-22: The Jim Rotondi quintet. Two nights of unashamed neo-hard bop from the high-spirited trumpeter along with like-minded guests, including the saxophonist Eric Alexander and the pianist David Hazeltine.

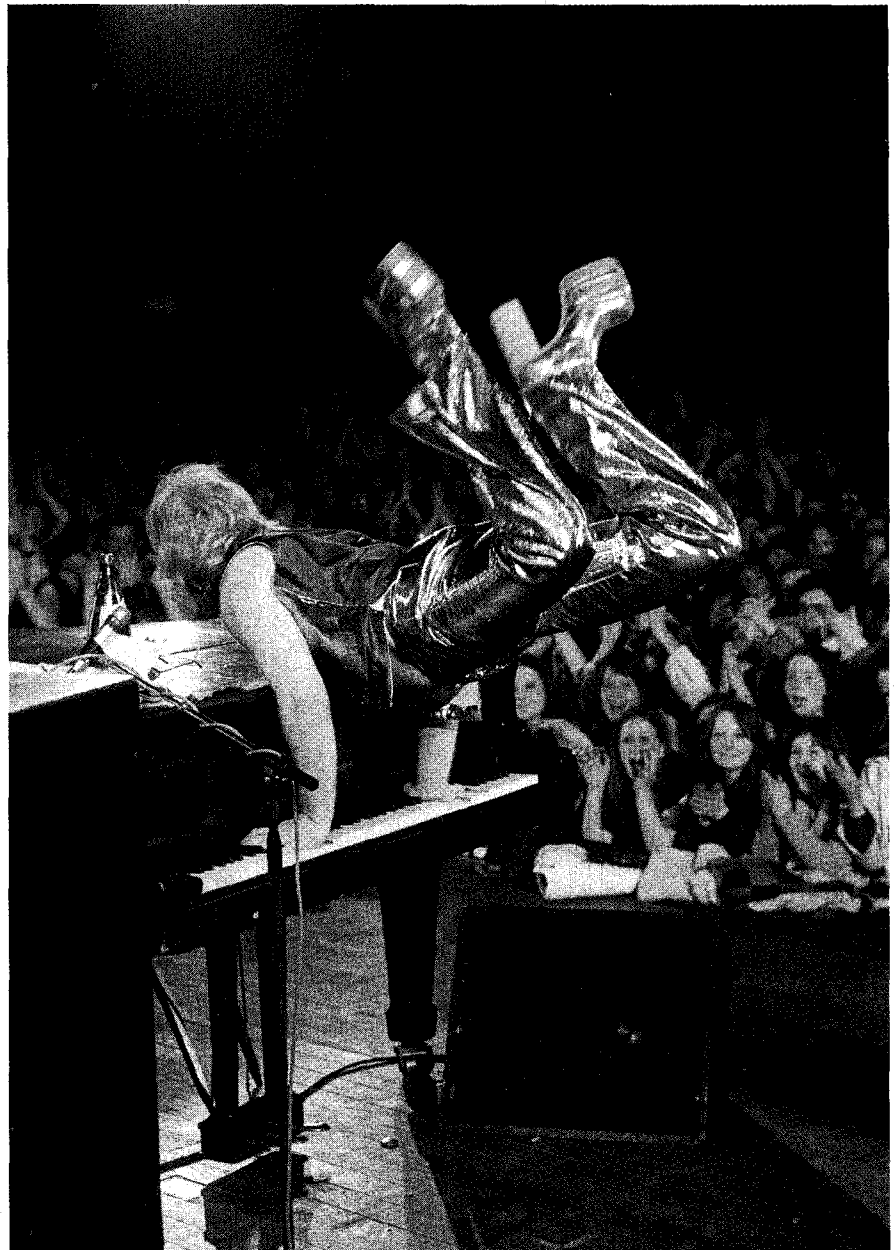
VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 20-25: A leading proponent of the contemporary flamenco style of Spain, the guitarist Niño Josele makes his Village Vanguard debut as a leader in the secure company of the bassist John Benitez and the drummer Horacio (El Negro) Hernandez.

Jan. 3. ♦ "American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915." Through Jan. 24. ♦ "Watteau, Music, and Theater." Through Nov. 29. ♦ "Pablo Bronstein." Through Feb. 21. ♦ "Eccentric Visions: The World of Luo Ping (1733-1799)." Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Monet's Water Lilies." Through April 12. ♦ "Polish Posters 1945-89." Through Nov. 30. ♦ "Paul Sietsema." Through Feb. 15. ♦ "New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull,



Barrie Wentzell's 1973 photograph of Elton John, in "Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History," opening Oct. 30 at the Brooklyn Museum.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid.'" Through Nov. 29. ♦ "Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868." Opens Oct. 21. ♦ "Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'" Through

Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek." Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"Kandinsky." Through Jan. 13. ♦ "Anish Kapoor: Memory." Opens Oct. 21. ♦ "Gabriele Münter and Vasily Kandinsky, 1902-14: A Life in Photographs." Through Jan. 13. ♦ "Intervals: Kitty Kraus." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Paired, Gold: Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Roni Horn." Through

Jan. 6. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.) **WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART** Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—“Georgia O’Keeffe: Abstraction.” Through Jan. 17. ♦ “Steve Wolfe on Paper.” Through Nov. 29. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—“James Tissot: ‘The Life of Christ.’” Opens Oct. 23. ♦ “From the Village to Vogue: The Modernist Jewelry of Art Smith.” Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—“Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time.” Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—“Thomas Chambers (1808-1869): American Marine and Landscape Painter.” Through March 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—“Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan.” Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—“Design USA: Contemporary Innovation.” Through April 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—“Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: Chronotopes & Dioramas.” Through April 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays, 1 to 4.)

THE DRAWING CENTER

35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—“Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World.” Through Dec. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—“Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop.” Through Jan. 17. ♦ “Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection.” Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—“Dress Codes: The Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Video.” Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY

333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—“Serizawa: Master of Japanese Textile Design.” Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—“Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life.” Through Feb. 7. ♦ “Rite Now: Sacred and Secular in Video.” Through Feb. 7. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—“William Blake’s World: A New Heaven Is Begun.” Through Jan. 3. ♦ “Celebrating Puccini.” Through Jan. 10. ♦ “Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings.” Through Jan. 3. ♦ “Where the Wild Things Are: Original Drawings by Maurice Sendak.” Through Nov. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—“Voces y Visiones: Four Decades through El Museo del

Barrio’s Permanent Collection.” Through Feb. 28. ♦ “Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis.” Through Feb. 28. (Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5)

MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN

2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—“Slash: Paper Under the Knife.” Through April 4. ♦ “Ghost Stories: New Design from Nendo.” Opens Oct. 27. ♦ “Read My Pins: The Madeleine Albright Collection.” Through Jan. 31. (Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6; and Thursday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—“Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York

temporary sensibilities. He worked in black-and-white and with a wide variety of pre-Photoshop collage and montage techniques to make memorably provocative pictures: a young preppy couple with babies’ heads, the Washington Monument as a stake for giant horseshoes, “American Gothic” restaged with Shirley Chisholm and George Wallace. Subtlety was not Gescheidt’s forte; his humor was broad and aimed at men, with bare breasts as objects of fun and a woman’s crotch looming like a dark, ominous cave before a miniature man. But if many of these images are tasteless period pieces, others (like a series on the difficulties of stopping smoking) remain pointed and alarm-



“Rembrandt’s J’Accuse,” by Peter Greenaway, opens Oct. 21 at Film Forum.

City, Photographs by Joel Meyerowitz.” Through March 7. ♦ “The Edge of New York: Waterfront Photographs.” Through Nov. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—“Lincoln and New York.” Through March 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

SCULPTURECENTER

44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—“A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith.” Through Dec. 30. ♦ “In Practice Fall 2009.” Through Nov. 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—“Hurvin Anderson.” Through Oct. 25. ♦ “Artists in Residence: Khalif Kelly, Adam Pendleton, Dawit L. Petros.” Through Oct. 25. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

ALFRED GESCHEIDT

Gescheidt’s photographs, made between 1949 and 1979, are brash, crass, and bound to offend con-

ingly funny. Through Oct. 24. (Higher Pictures, 764 Madison Ave., at 65th St. 212-249-6100.)

Short List

JACQUES HENRI LARTIGUE: Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Oct. 24. **MAYA LIN:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Nov. 13. **SARAH MCENEANEY:** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through Oct. 24. **SALLY MANN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Oct. 31.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

EVELYNE AXELL

The presence of the Belgian painter Evelyn Axell (1935-72) on the Brussels art scene was likened by the critic Pierre Restany to a “sexual revolution in art.” There’s ample evidence here, in vibrant paintings on Plexiglas: erotic (and autoerotic) portraits of nude women. In one, a hummingbird flies toward the subject’s less-than-private parts, as if homing in on nectar. Axell’s similarities to offbeat Pop artists like Tom Wesselmann and John Wesley are obvious, so why her relative obscurity? Like Dorothy

KYLE T. WEBSTER

Iannone—a similarly sex-positive painter, whose career has been lately resuscitated—Axell deserves to be better known. Through Nov. 21. (Broadway 1602, at 1182 Broadway, at 28th St. 212-481-0362.)

GEORGE GROSZ

In America, from 1933 until a year before his death, in 1959, Grosz spun his wheels in sands of freedom and security. He remained a great graphic artist and a pretty good painter, but nothing concentrated his genius like the depravity and menace of Weimar Berlin. A smartly curated show of twenty-nine pictures in a salad of styles—ranging from surrealist-ically eroticized beach scenes, painted at his summer home on Cape Cod, to the suitably sulfurous “Cain or Hitler in Hell” (1944)—contests gamely, but in vain, the stark truth of Grosz’s decline. He could cope with anything but personal happiness. Through Oct. 31. (Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190.)

TIM HYDE

There are ambitious concepts behind the photographic projects and video in Hyde’s smart, spare show. Not all of them come across, but that doesn’t interfere with our appreciation of the works’ eccentricity and visual appeal. The most successful series begins with color photographs of a young man in a suburban parking lot struggling with a large white board that he appears to be raising into the air. Hyde has sliced and collaged each of the series’ fourteen images to create an architecture of suspended planes, like elements in a kaleidoscope devised by Frank Gehry. As the young artist attempts to balance his shape-shifting ideas, the creative process all but eclipses the material world. Through Oct. 31. (Protech, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999.)

Short List

ANDREA BOWERS: Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Opens Oct. 24. **PAUL CHAN:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Opens Oct. 22. **SPENCER FINCH:** Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323. Opens Oct. 24. **RED GROOMS:** Marlborough, 545 W. 25th St. 212-463-8634. Through Nov. 14. **MICHAEL JOO:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Opens Oct. 22. **JUSTINE KURLAND:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Nov. 14. **NICK MAUSS:** 303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-5566. Opens Oct. 23. **SARAH MORRIS:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Opens Oct. 23. **MATTHEW RITCHIE:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Opens Oct. 23. **STERLING RUBY:** Foxy Productions, 617 W. 27th St. 212-239-2758. Through Nov. 21. **BILL VIOLA:** James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Opens Oct. 23.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

MARC CAMILLE CHAIMOWICZ

Strange days when a much imitated style pales in comparison to its imitators. But such is the case with the Paris-born Chaimowicz’s show, which reprises an installation he conceived in 1972, the same year that Artists Space was founded. In the ensuing decades, the piece, titled “Enough Tyranny,” has attained cult status in avant-garde circles, not least for presaging the glam aesthetic—and identity politics—of the “scatter art” movement of the nineties. The title is painted, Helter Skelter-style, on the walls, above a melee of tea candles, glitter, flowers, party masks, colored lights, disco balls, and other tchotchkes, arranged around two plywood fountains swimming with koi. (A box of Doublemint gum winkingly reinforces the doubling.) Music blares from a boom box: Dylan, Ziggy Stardust-era Bowie, Roxy Music, the Velvet Underground, the Stones. A television is tuned to static, an apt metaphor for the disappointing fizzle of the show. Through Nov. 14. (Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-226-3970.)

Short List

CAETANO DE ALMEIDA: Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930. Through Nov. 15. **BRENDAN FOWLER:** Rental, 120 East Broadway. 212-608-6002. Opens Oct. 24. **JULIA GOLDMAN:**

Museum 52, at 4 E. 2nd St. 347-789-7072. Through Nov. 14. **JUSTIN MATHERLY:** Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Nov. 1. **LAURA OWENS:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Opens Oct. 24. **“THE BICHON FRISÉ IN ART”:** Rental, 120 East Broadway. 212-608-6002. Through Oct. 25.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

SIMON ROBERTS

“We English,” the title of Roberts’s engrossing exhibition of large-scale color photographs (and the related book) might lead you to expect gently satiric social studies in the style of Martin Parr. But the focus of the work is primarily landscape, and several of the images are broad, handsome vistas with only a few people scattered about the terrain. Even the photographs that include larger groups were taken from a distance—a perspective that echoes classical painting, although the subjects (golfers before a line of cooling towers, race contestants sloughing through the mud of a river at low tide) are decidedly contemporary. Through Oct. 24. (Klompching, 111 Front St. 212-796-2070.)

“CAUGHT OR CAPTURED”

This new gallery presents a smart show of portrait photographs in color by Bill Sullivan and Charles Fréger. Sullivan’s big pictures take his subjects unaware. In the largest images here, he surprises subway riders coming through the turnstiles; several of them appear startled by the camera, but most are oblivious of the attention. Fréger, making his U.S. gallery debut, takes a more formal approach in work that has an anthropological bent and a witty fashion spin. His subjects are a group of Namibians celebrating the survival of their tribe by dressing up in military uniforms that incorporate remnants of the outfits of their former German rulers as well as incongruous elements like spears, kilts, and a helmet with horns. Through Nov. 25. (Caption, 55 Washington St. 718-504-7991.)

DANCE

CEDAR LAKE CONTEMPORARY BALLET

In “Orbo Novo,” Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui explores the rugged terrain of consciousness after a stroke, based on the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor’s articulate account of her own experience. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 20-21 at 7:30, Oct. 22-23 at 8, Oct. 24 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 25 at 2 and 7:30.)

“SONGS OF ASCENSION”

In Meredith Monk’s new work, a dreamlike ambience is assisted by Ann Hamilton’s beautiful video designs and an onstage string quartet. Monk, her dancers, and the singers of Vocal Ensemble explore the sensual and spiritual dimensions of circling—around an axis, around a space, around a musical phrase. The ultimate goal is ascension, in the sense of awareness of the divine. (BAM’s Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 21-24 at 7:30 and Oct. 25 at 3.)

QUANZHOU MARIONETTE THEATRE

Carnegie Hall’s festival of Chinese arts, “Ancient Paths, Modern Voices” (see also “Works & Process”), opens with an ancient Chinese art form from the southern province of Fujian. Led by the director Wang Jingxian, the puppets—twenty to thirty centimeters tall and controlled by up to thirty-six strings—use subtle movements as well as surprising feats of prowess, like riding a unicycle while twirling two spears, to enact folktales from the Imperial period. In Chinese with English supertitles. (Zankel Hall, Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. Oct. 21 at 7:30.)

WAVE RISING SERIES

The enterprising choreographer and curator Young Soon Kim kicks off the fourth edition of her eclectic dance showcase. Performers include Dietz Marchant, Carolyn Dorfman, and Johannes Wieland, and two Korean companies, Milmul Modern Dance Company and WonKim & Coll, have their New York debuts. For a full schedule, visit www.white-wavedance.com. (John Ryan, 25 Jay St., Brooklyn.

CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK BABY’S ON FIRE

A toddler is lost in Long Island City. His name is Baby Ikki, an alter ego of Michael Smith, the New York performance artist who first wobbled out the pre-verbal, diaper-clad character in 1975. He’s Sweet’Pea as scripted by



Albert Camus, an infantile avatar of alienation. In 2008, Smith teamed up with the Los Angeles art star Mike Kelley (a master of abject grotesquerie) to set Baby loose in the Nevada desert, amid the dreadlocked trustafarians and body-painting ravers who descend every summer for Burning Man. Video documentation of Ikki’s odyssey is the heart of “A Voyage of Growth and Discovery,” at the SculptureCenter, running on six giant screens that ring the dark gallery, converted into a fever dream of a playground. A geodesic jungle gym is lined with plush toys and draped in a cloud-patterned sleeping bag; a totem pole of stuffed animals rises from vertical monkey bars. Onscreen, Burning Man, which bills itself as a festival of “radical self-expression,” looks more like a paean to run-of-the-mill self-absorption—a spectacle of parallel play.

—Andrea K. Scott

718-855-8822. Oct. 21-23 at 7:30 and Oct. 24-25 at 4 and 7:30. Through Nov. 8.)

DANCENOW [NYC] FESTIVAL

The downtown festival of short dance works—all seven minutes or less—presents its final installment at Joe's Pub. Over three evenings, ten choreographers and troupes—including Tami Stronach, Christina Reaves, and Dixie Fun Dance Theatre—will offer a combination of works in progress, excerpts, and tailor-made morsels. For a full schedule, visit www.dancenowny.org. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8777. Oct. 22 at 7:30, Oct. 23 at 8, and Oct. 24 at 9:30.)

NEAL MEDLYN/DANCE GANG

First up in a double bill of absurdity, Kennis Hawkins and Will Rawls, a towering pair of theatrical guerrillas known as Dance Gang, take their opening-act position as a ready-made format for music-making and other silliness. Medlyn, the beloved geek in glasses who has previously incarnated Prince and Beyoncé, turns his attention to Britney Spears and the idea of purity. As ever, you can expect fabulous outfits, hilarity, total commitment, and no lip-synching. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 22-24 at 7:30.)

DAVID ROUSSEVE/REALITY

"Saudade" attempts to evoke the bittersweet emotion encapsulated in that Portuguese word. The music is fado, but the stories that Rousseve tells, inhabiting various characters as he travels a slow diagonal across the stage, are African-American and Southern. Around him, members of the multicultural cast apply their own traditions—bharata natyam, Indonesian—to the subject and score, juxtaposing agonized frenzy with adagio longing in a not very subtle representation of resilience through dance. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 22-25 at 8.)

COMPANHIA DE DANÇA DEBORAH COLKER

Aspects of the Brazilian choreographer's varied quartet of dances, "4 x 4," leave no mystery about why she was hired by Cirque du Soleil. Her sense of spectacle fits a high-class circus—one effect after another without much dance continuity. Those effects, which include both props (a conveyor-belt-equipped table, an obstacle course of porcelain vases) and physical feats (inventive gymnastics, pointe work), surprise and thrill, and her company of short-haired women and buff men sometimes resembles a chic Pilobolus. But the playful sexuality of the third section is fascinatingly foreign: crotch-grabbing and body-sniffing delivered with bright smiles. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 22-24 at 8 and Oct. 25 at 3.)

"CHARLIE'S ANGELS"

The Charlie in this evening of tap choreographed by the phenomenal Jason Samuels Smith is Charlie Parker, the galvanic bebop saxophonist. The angels are three young ladies—Chloe Arnold, Michelle Dorrance, and Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards—who not only have the chops to match every rhythmic twist in Parker's recordings, but can do so in bustiers and pumps, looking good enough to challenge either Farrah Fawcett's or Cameron Diaz's gang. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 22-23 at 8 and Oct. 24 at 3 and 8.)

CLANCYWORKS DANCE COMPANY

The Maryland-based troupe will perform four works by Adrienne Clancy, a choreographer fascinated by the complexities of partnering. Live music will be provided by the percussionist Zak Fusciello and the vocalist Leah Smith. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 23-24 at 8.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" / SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS

At the Guggenheim (in conjunction with the "Ancient Paths, Modern Voices" festival), the highly aesthetic Chinese-American choreographer Shen Wei will present a series of excerpts from his work over the past ten years, from the surrealist "Folding" (2000)—in which dancers in white makeup and egg-shaped headdresses skim the stage, their feet hidden by long skirts—to more abstract, modernist works like his "Rite of Spring" (2003) and this year's "Re," a meditation on the East. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Oct. 24-25 at 7:30.)

MORGAN THORSON / "HEAVEN"

A quickly rising choreographer in Minneapolis, Thorson manifests spiritual ambitions in "Heaven." The Minnesotan slowcore band Low provides much of

the mood in ambient noise, scraping sounds, and ethereal vocals, to which the dancers also contribute. Thorson arranges her cast in barefoot flocks, processing across the stage with downcast eyes. Some break off, bowing repeatedly in a devotional gesture that's also reminiscent of a cuckoo clock. From there, the movement opens up, fits of possession in tension with slow revolutions, arms raised skyward, alternating currents of ritualistic ecstasy. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 25 at 6. Through Oct. 30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

"Aida," featuring Violeta Urmana, Dolora Zajick, Johan Botha, and Carlo Guelfi in the leading roles; The estimable Daniele Gatti conducts. (Oct. 21 at 8 and Oct. 24 at 1.) ♦ The beautiful Marschallin—Renée Fleming, completely in her element—in "Der Rosenkavalier" may fret about the passing of time, but time always seems to stop when the Met revives its 1969 production of Strauss's glamorous comedy. This is to the good, since it provides a platform for such singers as Susan Graham, Miah Persson, and Kristinn Sigmundsson to do solid work. But fatigue is setting in; perhaps this should be the next production to go under Peter Gelb's well-sharpened axe. Jens Georg Bachman conducts. (Oct. 22 at 7:30.) ♦ Interactivity came to the Met last season with the premiere of the Robert Lepage production of "La Damnation de Faust," the thrilling quasi-operatic oratorio by Berlioz: fantastical video images (which fluctuate according to the singers' movements and voices) are superimposed on a giant scaffold of a set, allowing the cast (which includes a dexterous group of acrobats) to defy the strictures of space and gravity that would normally limit the visual potential of Goethe's diabolical tale. The revival, conducted by James Conlon, features Olga Borodina, Ramón Vargas, and Ildar Abdrazakov in the leading roles. (Oct. 23 at 8:30 and Oct. 26 at 8.) ♦ Bartlett Sher's saucy and ebullient production of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," with Joyce DiDonato as its Rosina and with Barry Banks, Rodion Pogossow, John Del Carlo, and Orlin Anastassov completing the cast; Maurizio Benini. (Oct. 24 at 8:30 and Oct. 27 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

BAM: "SONGS OF ASCENSION"

Meredith Monk's latest work uses music and movement to explore the themes of circling and ascension that permeate most of the world's spiritual traditions. At the center of the orchestra of voices, winds, and percussion is the Todd Reynolds String Quartet; Ann Hamilton, Monk's principal collaborator, created the video accompaniment, which stretches around the walls of the Harvey Theatre. (651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 21-24 at 7:30 and Oct. 25 at 3.)

VERTICAL PLAYER REPERTORY:

"A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE"

William Bolcom's opera, based on Arthur Miller's tragedy about a family of Red Hook longshoremen (and made in collaboration with Miller), was first seen at Chicago Lyric Opera and the Metropolitan; it now migrates, appropriately, to Brooklyn in a new arrangement with two-piano accompaniment and with the company's director, Judith Barnes, featured in the cast. (219 Court St., Cobble Hill. 800-838-3006. Oct. 22 at 8, Oct. 24 at 3, and Oct. 25 at 4. Through Nov. 1.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Bernard Haitink—master craftsman of unshowy but deeply integrated interpretations—leads Britain's finest orchestra in three programs that combine music by Mahler and Schubert. Oct. 21 at 8: Lincoln Center's Great Performers season opens with two symphonies, Schubert's jolly Fifth and Mahler's transcendent Fourth (with the soprano Miah Persson). ♦ Oct. 23 at 8: More serious matters are taken up in the

next concert, featuring Schubert's Symphony No. 8 ("Unfinished") and Mahler's melancholy song cycle "Das Lied von der Erde" (with the vocalists Christianne Stotijn and Robert Gambill). ♦ Oct. 25 at 3: The series closes with a performance of Mahler's supreme symphony, No. 9 in D Major. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

MUSICA SACRA

Richard Westernberg's proud institution enters its forty-fifth season under the sure command of Kent Tittle, Gotham's choral man of the moment. The chorus's first concert features performances of Scarlatti's "Stabat Mater" (a ten-voice tour de force) and three works by Bach (including the Cantata No. 82, "Ich Habe Genug"), all with chamber-orchestra accompaniment. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-734-7688. Oct. 24 at 8.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES:

STILE ANTICO

Leave it to this topnotch series, based at Corpus Christi Church, to host the New York debut of a red-hot new group. This time it's the acclaimed British chamber choir, who perform "Song of Songs," a sequence of sensuous Biblical settings by Palestrina, Gombert, and Victoria, among others. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Oct. 25 at 4.)

"ANCIENT PATHS, MODERN VOICES":

JUILLARD ORCHESTRA

As part of Carnegie Hall's big festival of Chinese music, the eminent composer and conductor Tan Dun leads the school's flagship ensemble in an evening of his own works, including "Silk Road" and the world premiere of his Violin Concerto, "The Love" (with Cho-Liang Lin). (Alice Tully Hall. Oct. 26 at 7:30. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

JUILLARD BAROQUE

Better late than never: the school goes all-in for Baroque performance studies, bringing in the violinist Monica Huggett—one of the great nineteenth-century pioneers—to head its program. She leads her new faculty ensemble (which includes such musicians as the violinist Robert Mealy and the flutist Sandra Miller) in an all-Bach concert that features the "Musical Offering" and the Concerto for Oboe and Strings in F Major. (Paul Hall, Juilliard School. Oct. 27 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC

The floating chamber-music series dives into the modern this week with two of its occasional "Here and Now" concerts. In the first, the pianist Thomas Schultz makes his barge debut performing music by John Cage, Hyo-shin Na, and Frederic Rzewski (including the classic "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Oct. 21 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

MURRAY PERAHIA

The poetic and deeply serious pianist returns to Carnegie Hall to offer several classics, including Beethoven's Sonata No. 30, Op. 109, Schumann's "Kinderszenen," and a selection of Chopin (the Scherzo No. 4 and three mazurkas). (212-247-7800. Oct. 23 at 8.)

PACIFICA QUARTET

The torch has been passed at the Metropolitan Museum, as the storied Guarneri String Quartet cedes its residency status to this young and dexterous ensemble. Their program features Mozart's "Dissonant" Quartet, Janáček's Quartet No. 2 ("Intimate Letters"), and Brahms's Quartet in A Minor. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 24 at 7.)

CHRISTIAN TETZLAFF

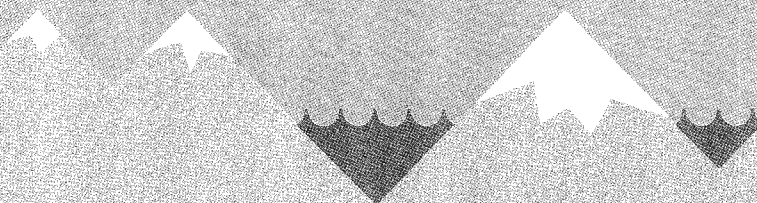
Few musicians combine passion and intelligence as alluringly as this young German violinist, who alights at the 92nd Street Y to perform all six of J. S. Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin (in a midday concert that includes a ninety-minute break). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 25 at noon.)

JOYCE DIDONATO AND ERIC OWENS

Two stellar Met singers, just entering their prime, offer a heterogeneous concert of music by Rossini, Schubert, Lalo, Cole Porter, and others under the auspices of the George London Foundation, at the



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Morgan Library & Museum's concert hall. (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-956-2809. Oct. 25 at 4:30.)

MUSIC AT THE FRICK COLLECTION:

MASQUES

This award-winning Montreal Baroque group takes its name from the courtly entertainments of Elizabethan England. Its upcoming concert mixes music by Biber, Purcell (airs and dances from "The Fairy Queen"), Vivaldi, Rameau, and J. C. F. Bach. (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Oct. 25 at 5.)

"ANCIENT PATHS, MODERN VOICES"

Carnegie Hall celebrates both the achievements of contemporary Chinese musicians and the glory of their country's musical heritage in a parade of concerts at venues all over the city. Oct. 26 at 7:30: In "Class of 1978," Carnegie's Ensemble ACJW forays into music by some of the talented composers who emerged from the wreckage of the Cultural Revolution and went on to forge major careers—such as Chen Qigang ("Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin"), Chen Yi, Bright Sheng (his String Quartet No. 3), and Zhou Long. (Weill Recital Hall.) ♦ Oct. 27 at 8: The irrepressible Lang Lang, today's leading celebrity of the classical piano, is beginning to take on the role of an elder statesman. He joins a bevy of gifted young Chinese musicians to perform music by Schubert, Mack Wilberg (a "Carmen" fantasy), and Tchaikovsky (the very

large space, where he'll team up with the saxophonist Dan Blake and other musicians to offer several wide-ranging explorations at the intersection of rock, free jazz, African music, and the classical tradition. (Ave. C at 2nd St. Oct. 27 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MOVIES OPENING

AMELIA

A bio-pic about Amelia Earhart. Directed by Mira Nair; starring Hilary Swank and Ewan McGregor. Opening Oct. 23. (In wide release.)

ANTICHRIST

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 23. (In limited release.)

ASTRO BOY

An animated adaptation of the Japanese comic-book series, about the life of a young robot. Featuring the voices of Nicolas Cage and Kristen Bell; directed by David Bowers. Opening Oct. 23. (In wide release.)

CIRQUE DU FREAK: THE VAMPIRE'S ASSISTANT In this horror film, directed by Paul Weitz, a boy meets a man who turns out to be a vampire. Starring John C. Reilly. Opening Oct. 23. (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO SAU VOI CORP. AND BAOQUETTE/PHO SURE

101 Lafayette St. (212-226-8184); 120 Christopher St. (212-929-0877)—The domino effect of the Vietnamese banh-mi sandwich took many years to gather speed. The banh mi—a baguette ("banh mi" translates to, basically, "bread") often filled with various pork products, pickled vegetables, fresh cilantro, and *sriracha*—has long been peddled in unassuming storefronts in the far reaches of Chinatown and Sunset Park. Some, in fact, seem to be clandestine sidelines for other businesses, like the kitchenette stashed at the end of a jewelry store hawking faux-jade Buddha pendants (the legendary Banh Mi Saigon Bakery, on Mott St.), or, in the case of the twenty-year-old Sau Voi Corp., a glass counter tucked inside a tiny battle-worn Asian-CD shop that also happens to sell bras, eye shadow, cigarettes, porn, and lotto tickets. If you find yourself on jury duty at lunch hour, you could do much worse than Sau Voi Corp.'s exemplary *bánh mì đặc biệt* (the requisite No. 1), stuffed by amiable counter ladies with pâté, pork roll (ingredients can include pork, cornstarch, fish sauce, MSG, salt, garlic, and baking powder), and Vietnamese ham (which often contains pig ear, for crunch), garnished with pickled carrots, daikon, cucumber, spicy garlic sauce, and foot-long sprigs of cilantro. The bread, crispy on the outside and soft inside, and the sweet-and-sour veggies are what make it; the mystery meats—the mark of a truly authen-

tic banh mi—could startle the faint of heart into long-term vegetarianism.

The sandwich might have remained a cultish underdog if not for the recession-friendly ambition of Michael (Bao) Huynh, who has recently expanded his Vietnamese restaurant empire to include Baoquette, a chainlet of slick banh-mi joints, with branches in Murray Hill, the East Village, the West Village, and, soon, Wall Street, midtown, and the Lower East Side. The namesake sandwich, billed as a classic banh mi, contains, appropriately, myriad pork varieties (a smear of pâté, crimson barbecued pork, a slice of headcheese, and a generous helping of pork roll), but the bread, though tasty, is too copious, and the garlicky pickling juices and fish sauce lend a bright sort of funkiness; ultimately, it verges on garish. On the other hand, there's irresistible pan-fried rice cake—tiny duck egg atop spongy rice-noodle-like cubes, flavorful sausage, and green papaya; the spicy, addictive Sloppy Bao sandwich (think Sloppy Joe but fantastic, with jalapeños and cilantro); and deeply nuanced *pho* (a comforting twenty-spice, marrow-shin-brisket broth rich with noodles and thin slabs of beef). Next stop: Atlantic City. (Open daily for lunch and dinner: Sau Voi sandwiches \$4-\$4.20; Baoquette sandwiches \$5-\$8.)

—Shauna Lyon



grand, and unforgiving, Piano Trio). (Stern Auditorium.) (212-247-7800. Note: For full schedule of concerts and other events, see www.carnegiehall.org.)

(LE) POISSON ROUGE:

HUGO WOLF QUARTET

This ardent young ensemble, named for the Viennese song composer, mixes classics (Schubert's Quartet No. 15 in G Major) with cutting-edge pieces (by Kenny Wheeler and Johannes Maria Staud) in a concert at the downtown music club that also features a performance by the Cavatina Trio (Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in C Minor). (158 Bleecker St. www.lpmc.com. Oct. 26 at 7:30.)

THE STONE: LUKAS LIGETI

Come early if you want to get a seat at this renowned percussionist and composer's gig at the tiny East Vil-

KILLING KASZTNER

A documentary, directed by Gaylen Ross, about the murder, in Israel, of a Jewish man who negotiated with Nazis for the release of Jews during the Second World War. Opening Oct. 23. (Cinema Village.)

NIGHT AND DAY

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Oct. 23. (Anthology Film Archives.)

ONG BAK 2

Tony Jaa stars in this action film, which he co-directed with Panna Rittikrai, about a Thai boxer who masters the sport's spiritual elements. In Thai. Opening Oct. 23. (Village East Cinemas.)

REMBRANDT'S J'ACCUSE

In this essay film, Peter Greenaway analyzes Rembrandt's "The Night Watch" for clues about

a murder plot in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Opening Oct. 21. (Film Forum.)

(UNTITLED)

A comedy about an art dealer who falls for an avant-garde composer. Directed by Jonathan Parker; starring Adam Goldberg and Marley Shelton. Opening Oct. 23. (In limited release.)

THE WEDDING SONG

Karin Albou directed this drama, about the friendship of two girls, one Muslim (Olympe Borval) and one Jewish (Lizzie Brocheré), in occupied Tunis during the Second World War. In French and Arabic. Opening Oct. 23. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING

LE AMICHE (THE GIRLFRIENDS)

Michelangelo Antonioni's fourth feature film, from 1955, is a glossy romantic melodrama of prosperous modernity. Clelia (Eleonora Rossi Drago) moves to Turin to open a new branch of the high-fashion boutique that she managed in Rome. When Rosetta, the flighty bourgeoisie in the adjoining hotel room, attempts suicide, Clelia takes her under her wing, joins her circle of friends, and gets caught up in their frivolous, desperate games of love. What makes this conventional drama mysteriously original is the details: the architectural contours of the film's myriad locations seem to determine the action of the people who traverse them, and the film's assortment of portraits, reflections, sketches, and eye-catching clothing have more reality than the empty, miserable characters to whom they lend identities. Antonioni's quietly audacious attempt to convey the inner workings of modern life is also a standard-issue romance—of exactly the sort that fills his heroines' minds. In Italian. —Richard Brody (MOMA; Oct. 25.)

CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY

Capitalism, according to Michael Moore: a system of organized theft in which the rich forever rob the poor. Moore gathers random examples of greedy behavior—for instance, a juvenile detention center in Pennsylvania that is run for profit, in which sentences for minor offenses are mysteriously extended. And he celebrates mini-revolts, as when the workers at Republic Windows and Doors, in Chicago, refused to leave when they were summarily fired. It's hard to quarrel with his anger over hardworking Americans who are tossed out of a job or a house, or with his grief over the fate of his home town, Flint, Michigan, the subject of his first success, "Roger and Me," twenty years ago. Moore has never recovered emotionally from the closing of the G.M. plants there. In the movie's most touching moment, he accompanies his father, now very old, as he stares in horror at the flattened wasteland where the plant he worked at once stood. But Moore is so mesmerized by Flint's tragedies that he thinks G.M. went bankrupt because it closed plants in the eighties. Modern capitalism, with its torrential flow of money across borders, is beyond him. It's a sad movie—funny in spots, but wounded and bewildered. —David Denby (Reviewed in our issue of 10/5/09.) (In wide release.)

COCO BEFORE CHANEL

Fulfilling the promise of its title, Anne Fontaine's film lifts the veil on the early years of Gabrielle Chanel. This is no guarantee of the naked truth, since, as Chanel's biographers admit, she was ferociously adept at cloaking her unmodish past in legend and lies; but our heroine's progress, nonetheless, has an air of plausibility—from the small, suffering lass at the orphanage to an unsuccessful tavern singer who segues smartly into a kept woman. The keepers are, first, a jolly landowner (Benoît Poelvoorde), and, second, a suspiciously smooth British heartbreaker named Boy (Alessandro Nivola). (Did Chanel, no fool, not realize that, under the rules of romance, you should never fall for a man called Boy?) These actors fare slightly better than Audrey Tautou, who launches into the lead role but seems unable to quell her natural cuteness; the real Coco could not have achieved what she did, you feel, without being as hard as chrome. Fashion followers, panting to see some classic Chanel designs, may feel cheated, since the movie halts precisely as her business gets going; there is a curious afterthought, before the final credits, in which modern su-

JESSIE WENDER



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK SHE, THE PEOPLE

Elia Kazan's "Wild River," from 1960, screening at Film Forum Oct. 23-29, is so strange and beautiful that critics have called it a neglected masterpiece. If the movie isn't exactly that, it's certainly one of the most resonantly self-critical



events in the history of liberal filmmaking. In 1935, a Tennessee Valley Authority official (Montgomery Clift), with government power and social progress on his side, tries to remove an outrageously willful matriarch (Jo Van Fleet) from her land before a newly built dam floods it. She won't leave, and the official finds himself increasingly respectful of her intransigence—and so does Kazan. In the end, the movie becomes an elegy to pioneer stubbornness. Kazan's direction is maddeningly deliberate, and some of the staging is stiff, but Lee Remick is extraordinary as the matriarch's granddaughter, a passionate woman who hurls herself against the anxieties and diffidence of Clift's official. The movie couldn't have greater present-tense resonance: how do you get people who loathe the federal government to do what's good for them when the government recommends it?

—David Denby

permodels traipse past the grande dame herself, but it's not clear what period—or what sort of ghostly fantasy—we are being invited to watch.—*Anthony Lane* (9/28/09) (In wide release.)

THE DAMNED UNITED

A great real-life sports story—the brief and catastrophic 1974 tenure of the arrogant, telegenic soccer coach Brian Clough at the helm of the best British club, Leeds United—is here reduced to the lowest common denominator. Peter Morgan's script, based on a novel by David Peace, jumps around from 1968, when Clough's prior club, Derby County, first crossed paths with Leeds, to the mid-seventies, and the result is too much information, and too little. Each segment of the sprawling story feels boiled down to the bare minimum; the episodes that remain hook up in obvious ways and never dig deep into character or incident. The drama converges around Clough's personal animosity toward Leeds's grizzled, beloved former coach Don Revie (Colm Meaney) and his self-destructive ways of slaking his resentment. But Michael Sheen, as the flamboyant Clough, seems oddly tamped-down and merely slick rather than ebullient; though Timothy Spall is quietly hearty as Peter Taylor, Clough's second-in-command, the director, Tom Hooper, does his cast no favors by concluding with actual archival clips of Clough and Taylor: their seductive vigor and devilish sparkle evoke depths unsounded by this superficial drama.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

AN EDUCATION

Peter Sarsgaard gives his best performance yet as David Goldman, a London hustler of enormous charm who zips around town in a maroon sports car, and who seduces, slowly and patiently, a very bright sixteen-year-old girl—Jenny (Carey Mulligan), a student from suburban Twickenham who is hemmed in by her cautious parents and her school and is rather too easily dazzled by champagne, a few dinner clubs, and a weekend in Paris. Based on a short memoir by the talented, acid-tongued journalist Lynn Barber (first published in *Granta* magazine), the movie is set in 1962, when England was gradually emerging from postwar austerities and the fabled antics of swinging London were just getting under way. Carey Mulligan is self-possessed, but what makes the movie unusual is the strange innocence of Sarsgaard's seducer: David is a liar and swindler, but he is as eager as Jenny is for pleasures of every kind—he enjoys them as if for the first time. The novelist Nick Hornby did the adaptation; the director, Lone Scherfig, born in Denmark, is alive to the social nuances of class and money in England. With Emma Thompson as a formidable, stupid, anti-Semitic schoolmistress.—*D.D.* (10/19/09) (In wide release.)

THE INVENTION OF LYING

No one has ever lied, and deception is unknown. Such is the truth-loving, and downright creepy, world that is presented in this new comedy, written and directed by Ricky Gervais and Matthew Robinson. Gervais also stars as Mark, a chubby loser who spends his time bemoaning his fate as a chubby loser; some of the moans are in voice-over, others are directed at unsympathetic colleagues—the driest of them played by Tina Fey and Rob Lowe—or at the beauty (Jennifer Garner) whom Mark unfruitfully craves. Then, one day, he tells a lie (or, as he puts it, "I said something that wasn't"), and, from that point onward, the movie allows him free rein; he can devise hitherto unimaginable plots for the movie studio where he works and console the lonely with false reassurances, which they gladly accept. This is promising territory, but most of it goes to waste, as the film staggers and veers between a snarling sendup of religious faith and a mawkish, low-energy attempt at rom-com; love will find a way, Gervais appears to insist, resorting to the oldest fiction of all. With a suspicious number of cameo appearances, including one by his regular collaborator Stephen Merchant and another by Edward Norton.—*A.L.* (10/12/09) (In wide release.)

THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE

Amazingly, the most romantic Western is also the greatest American political movie. John Ford's 1962 epic evokes a vast swath of history through its painfully intimate story of two great men, the dearest of friends, who are in love with the same woman. James Stewart plays a tenderfoot lawyer who goes west and is waylaid by a highway robber; the woman who nurses him back to health (Vera Miles) is betrothed to a gun-

slinging rancher (John Wayne) who schools him in Western ways. The actors were never better—Stewart is deeply moving as an idealist who learns the price of realizing his vision, and Wayne's growling and strutting are tightly packed with purpose and duty. From start to finish, the printed word governs the action: the lawless Liberty (Lee Marvin) strews law books in the dust; the central love story turns on lessons in reading and writing; and, at the end, a local journalist delivers his resigned credo: "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Ford shows both the rousing myth and the humbling truth—about the extra-legal violence on which law is based. His sense of higher mission resounds each time Wayne calls Stewart—with just enough sarcasm to conceal his reverence—"pilgrim."—*R.B.* (BAM; Oct. 24.)

NIGHT AND DAY

The Korean director Hong Sang-soo takes on the self-imposed challenge of filming boredom and frustration without becoming boring and frustrating. Though he doesn't always succeed, he redeems even the few bare patches with exquisite style, self-excoriating confessional audacity, and keen cultural criticism. Most of the film takes place in Paris, to which Sung-nam (Kim Yeong-ho), a no longer young artist from Seoul, flees when he expects to be arrested on drug charges. Living in sodden exile in a hostel in the Fourteenth Arrondissement, he settles into the Korean expatriate community and spends his time with three young women who are well aware that he has a wife back home. Hong presents their uneasy liaisons as a series of diary entries, which are dated with title cards and apostrophized by Sung-nam's voice-over remarks, and he films them in tense, restrained long takes that suggest the sharp, dry strokes of engravings. Yet the clumsy entanglements they reveal are worlds away from the psychological subtleties of indigenous French romances, and this is Hong's point. Despite the ease of travel and the cross-cultural curiosity of contemporary globalized artists, the difference between modern France and repressed, tradition-bound South Korea remains, in Hong's view, as great as the title suggests. In Korean, French, and English.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

In this creep-o-rama, a San Diego couple believe that their house is haunted and set up a video camera in search of proof. The film, which was shot more than directed by Oren Peli, uses its minuscule fifteen-thousand-dollar budget to good effect; the grainy images and live sound heighten the suspense. There is not much to look at, but this failing, paradoxically, holds the attention. Peli understands that the root of true fear is in waiting for something to happen. A close inspection might reveal the movie's many flaws, but, as a communal scare experience, it's as enjoyable as a visit to a spook house.—*Bruce Diones* (In limited release.)

SENSO

Luchino Visconti's 1954 epic of the Risorgimento stars Alida Valli, as Livia, a patriotic Venetian countess, and Farley Granger, as Franz, the dreamy yet cynical Hapsburg lieutenant who bewitches her during the final months of Austria's occupation of Italy. Granger's callow superficiality fits the role of an officer who bounces between hedonism and schoolboy fantasies of glory, and Valli comes through with passionate conviction as an unhappily married woman whose burst of erotic love explodes long-held moral and political principles. The whole movie has an intoxicating romanticism. Visconti encloses this doomed couple in an amorous bubble; then he whooshes them into history. The exultantly operatic production actually opens in an opera house, at a performance of "Il Trovatore," but even more inspired than this blast of Verdi is the presence of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony on the soundtrack, which Visconti uses to express Livia's vaulting illusions—her desperate belief in Franz's devotion and in his speeches about the arbitrariness of national boundaries. In the love scenes, Visconti masterfully choreographs the play of hands on flesh and hair; his large-scale action set pieces are both spare and surging; and his depiction of the divided soul of a crisis-torn era is utterly contemporary. In Italian.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Oct. 26.)

A SERIOUS MAN

The Coen brothers in their black, bleak, belittling mode, and, except for a few moments, it's hell to sit

Which Emirates' destination is this?

It's on the mouth of the Ulhas River.

- | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Cairo | ☐ Singapore | ☐ Seoul | ☐ Colombo |
| ☐ Birmingham | ☐ Jeddah | ☐ Cape Town | ☐ Tehran |
| ☐ Karachi | ☐ Doha | ☐ Nairobi | ☐ Manchester |
| ☐ São Paulo | ☐ Thiruvananthapuram | ☐ Malta | ☐ Seychelles |
| ☐ Tripoli | ☐ Moscow | ☐ Hyderabad | ☐ Hong Kong |
| ☐ San Francisco | ☐ Luanda | ☐ Venice | ☐ Auckland |
| ☐ Rome | ☐ Lahore | ☐ Istanbul | ☐ Addis Ababa |
| ☐ Peshawar | ☐ Beijing | ☐ Beirut | ☐ Kochi |
| ☐ Kuwait | ☐ Brisbane | ☐ Durban | ☐ Houston |
| ☐ Ahmedabad | ☐ Chennai | ☐ Osaka | ☐ Dammam |
| ☐ Islamabad | ☐ Sydney | ☐ Melbourne | ☐ Kozhikode |
| ☐ Bangkok | ☐ Khartoum | ☐ Damascus | ☐ Milan |
| ☐ Accra | ☐ Dhaka | ☐ Bangalore | ☐ Muscat |
| ☐ Paris | ☐ Zurich | ☐ Los Angeles | ☐ Abidjan |
| ☐ New York | ☐ Jakarta | ☐ Frankfurt | ☐ Cochin |
| ☐ Mumbai | ☐ Dubai | ☐ Malé | ☐ Riyadh |
| ☐ London | ☐ Hamburg | ☐ Christchurch | ☐ Larnaca |
| ☐ Guangzhou | ☐ Perth | ☐ Bahrain | ☐ Glasgow |
| ☐ Tunis | ☐ Munich | ☐ Casablanca | ☐ Kolkata |
| ☐ Johannesburg | ☐ Shanghai | ☐ Manila | ☐ Mauritius |
| ☐ Vienna | ☐ Lagos | ☐ Nice | ☐ Dar es Salaam |
| ☐ Newcastle | ☐ Sana'a | ☐ Dusseldorf | |
| ☐ Toronto | ☐ Delhi | ☐ Kuala Lumpur | |
| ☐ Entebbe | ☐ Athens | ☐ Amman | |

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EXPLORE: DUBAI

Downtime in the Desert

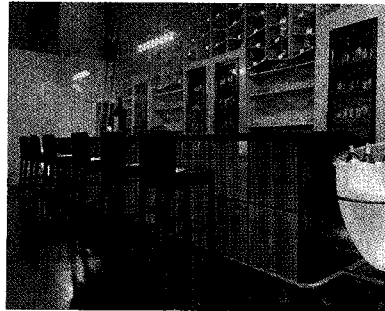
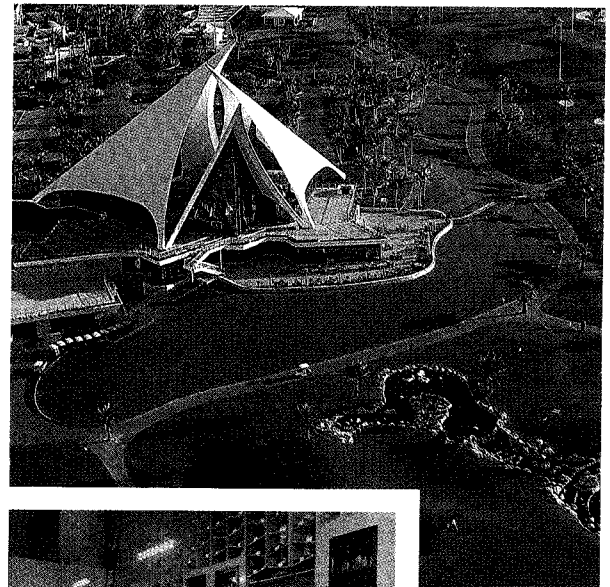
The crossroads of the Middle East may be best known as a bustling hub of activity, but Dubai also knows how to unwind.

There may be no better way to enhance your stay in the dynamic emirate than with a visit to one of Dubai's many pampering spas. Offering healing practices inspired by cultures around the world, these sanctuaries of well-being draw on Middle Eastern, Asian, and European traditions to heal and rejuvenate guests in aesthetically soothing surroundings.

Arrive via an *abra* ferry ride along the **Madinat Jumeirah Resort's** winding waterways and stroll through the tropical gardens before your treatment at the **Talise Spa**, one of the best in the Gulf; then enjoy the hot and cold plunge pools for the ultimate in refreshment. For a traditional Arabian experience, head to the Burj Al Arab's **Assawan Spa**, where colorfully tiled infinity swimming pools, steam rooms, saunas, and whirlpools complement the signature massage that mixes Shiatsu, Thai, Swedish, and Balinese techniques.

At the Moroccan-style **Amara spa** at the **Park Hyatt** near Dubai Creek, indulge in an outdoor rain shower followed by a treatment customized to energize, detoxify, or de-stress. Voted the best-value massage in Dubai, **Dreamworks** day spas specialize in a kneading and acupressure technique, which is accompanied by the application of soothing aromatherapy oils.

Once you've worked out the kinks, hit the links at one of the city's distinctive golf courses. The **Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club** features undulating fairways lined with date and coconut trees; its waterside location presents a special challenge on four of its eighteen holes. Two-time U.S. Open winner Ernie Els designed the



course at **The Els Club** in Dubai Sports City, which is landscaped with natural dunes and indigenous plants for a desert golf experience.

Late next month, **Jumeirah Golf Estates** will inaugurate the first of its four planned courses: Earth, Wind, Fire, and Water. The Earth course, designed by the golf legend Greg Norman, will host the **Dubai World Championship** November 19th to 22nd—the eagerly anticipated finale of the European Tour.

When you're ready for a nightcap, Dubai's bars and lounges offer nonpareil cocktails and a range of settings where you can mingle and unwind. At the Grosvenor House hotel in Dubai's Marina district, the **Buddha Bar** attracts a lively crowd to darkly lit nooks while the stylishly subdued **Bar 44**, on the 44th floor, looks out over the marina and Palm Jumeirah Island. **Cin Cin**, at the Fairmont, is an avant-garde wine bar, which pairs four hundred international vintages with a cutting-edge menu including mini *wagyu* burgers. For an ocean view and a traditional Arabic setting, head to the **Roof Top** bar at the One & Only Royal Mirage on Jumeirah Beach.

You can even incorporate relaxation into your itinerary at the Dubai International Airport's **Timeless Spa**. Operated by **Emirates Hotels & Resorts**, the spa offers passengers a calming haven in the first- and business-class lounges. Hand and foot therapies, massages, or a hot shave will rejuvenate you before or after your flight.

However you choose to relax, whether on a manicured desert golf course, in an award-winning spa or a dramatically stylish lounge, Dubai offers many routes to tranquillity when you're ready to take a break from it all.

Visit DefinitelyDubai.com for more information.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: IMAGES COURTESY OF THE BURJ AL ARAB'S ASSAWAN SPA & HEALTH CLUB; DUBAI CREEK GOLF & YACHT CLUB; FAIRMONT DUBAI'S CIN CIN

through. The movie, set in a Minneapolis suburb in 1967, is a deadpan farce about middle-class bad taste (Jewish division), with a schlemiel job as its hero—Professor Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), a physicist at a local university whose life is falling apart. Gopnik's wife (Sari Lennick) is leaving him for a sanctimonious bastard (Fred Melamed) who covers his aggressions against Larry with limp-pawed caresses and offers of "understanding." Larry's kids are thieving brats, and his sick, whining brother (Richard Kind) camps out on the living-room couch and refuses to look for work. There's more, much more, including a series of mishaps, sordid betrayals, and weird coincidences, but Larry, a sweet guy and "a serious man"—upright, a good teacher, a caring father—won't hit back. One wonders what kind of revenge the Coens are enacting; whatever indignities they suffered as teens, they can't have been much affected by them as grownups. Shot with mainly local actors in a super-hard-focus style by Roger Deakins. As a work of film craftsmanship, the movie is fascinating; in every other way, it's insufferable.—D.D. (10/5/09) (In wide release.)

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

After a strong beginning, Spike Jonze's live-action adaptation of Maurice Sendak's children's classic runs into the sands. Max (Max Records), an angry nine-year-old boy, bites his mother (Catherine Keener), runs out of the house, and joins the creatures—snouted, horned, clawed, furry—on a mysterious island. "Let the wild rumpus start!" he shouts, and they all run and jump, bash each other, and fall down in a heap, with Max happily buried among them. Jonze was right to use actors in elaborate suits (designed by Jim Henson's company) rather than fully animated figures. Most of the movements are weighted, rather than slickly virtuosic or glib. But after the opening scenes the movie turns unbearably melancholy. The creatures have mysterious relations with one another—friendships, love affairs, and long-standing grudges. They throw jealous fits or walk off in a huff, and we don't know where the hurt feelings are coming from or where they are going; after a while, the wild things sound like peevish adults elbowing one another out of the way at the Zabar's smoked-fish counter. The movie seems to be less about liberation than about futility. The creatures are voiced by James Gandolfini, Forest Whitaker, Chris Cooper, Paul Dano, and Catherine O'Hara. Screenplay by Jonze and Dave Eggers.—D.D. (10/19/09) (In wide release.)

ZOMBIELAND

Woody Harrelson has a rip-roaring time in this comic splatterfest as a redneck from hell who is out to kill zombies. It's the kind of genre acting that doesn't get much notice, but it's a gleeful rampage of a performance. Though the movie owes a lot to its British predecessor, "Shaun of the Dead," it has an American pop edge that cuts through the familiar. This is basically a road movie, about a group of travellers (Jesse Eisenberg, Abigail Breslin, and Emma Stone) who are looking for safe haven after a worldwide plague has turned most of the population into flesh-eating ghouls. As directed by Ruben Fleischer, the action is all rabid mayhem—well played and blessedly disposable. With a memorable cameo by a Hollywood legend that says more about Tinseltown than hundreds of blood-sucking freaks do.—B.D. (In wide release.)

Also Playing

COUPLES RETREAT: In wide release. **THE MAID:** In limited release. **THE STEPFATHER:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Cat Art Film Festival. Oct. 23 at 7: Short-film program, including "Cat's Cradle" (1959, Stan Brakhage). ♦ Oct. 23 at 8:45: Short-film program, including "Showing Me the Way to Heaven" (2009, Tracey Emin). ♦ Oct. 24 at 7: "The Case of the Grinning Cat" (2004, Chris Marker). ♦ Oct. 24 at 9: "The Pink Panther" (1963, Blake Edwards).

ARCLIGHT THEATRE

152 W. 71st St. (212-712-7237)—The Silent Clowns Film Series. Oct. 25 at 2: "Dr. Jack" (1922, Fred Newmeyer) and "The Haunted House" (1921, Buster Keaton and Edward F. Cline).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Hungarians in Hollywood." Oct. 21 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Souls at Sea" (1937, Henry Hathaway). ♦ Oct. 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Passage to Marseille" (1944, Michael Curtiz). ♦ Oct. 26 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Paper Moon" (1973, Peter Bogdanovich). ♦ Oct. 27 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Invisible Agent" (1942, Edwin L. Marin). ♦ "1962: New York Film Critics Circle." Oct. 23 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Lola" (1961, Jacques Demy; in French). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by Armond White. ♦ Oct. 24 at 6 and 9: "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" (†). ♦ Oct. 25 at 1:30 and 7:30: "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962, David Lean). The 1:30 screening will be followed by a panel discussion.

FILM FORUM

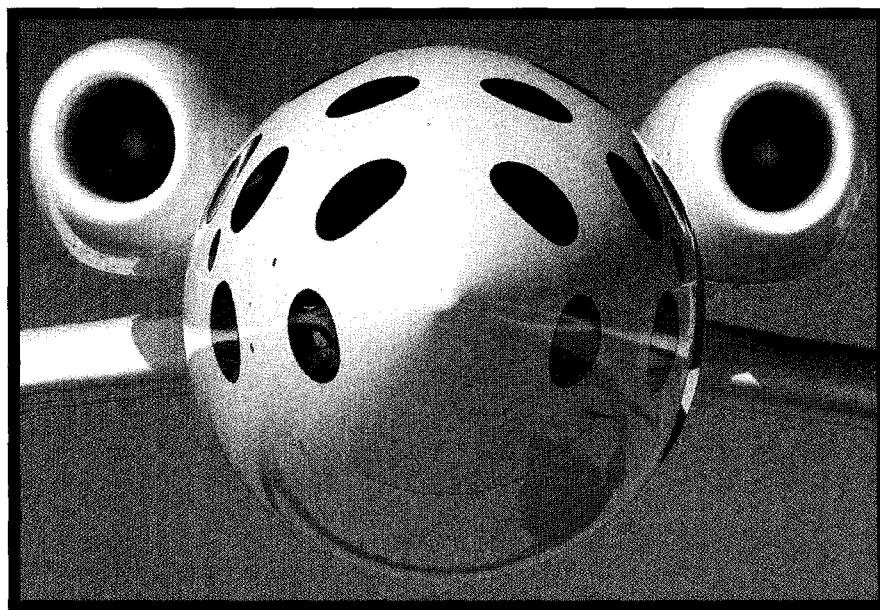
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Oct. 29: The films of Elia Kazan. Oct. 21 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "A Face in the Crowd" (1957). ♦ Oct. 22 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Last Tycoon" (1976). ♦ Oct. 23-29 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Wild River" (1960).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screening. Oct. 23-25 at 11 A.M.: "Genesis Blues" (1999, Roko and Adrian Belic). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 23-24: "The Life of Brian" (1979, Terry Jones). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Oct. 27 at 8: "The Good Fight" (1984, Noel Buckner, Mary Dore, and Sam Sills).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Oct. 21-23 at 1:30 "The Abyss" (1910, Urban Gad; silent with Danish intertitles) and "Ingeborg Holm" (1913, Victor Sjöström; silent with Swedish intertitles). ♦ "Carte Blanche: Béla Tarr and Sántántangó." All films are in Hungarian. Oct. 22 at 4:30: "Passion" (1998, György Fehér). ♦ Oct. 22 at 8: "Johanna" (2005, Kornél Mundruczó). ♦ Oct. 23 at 4:30: "The Poor Outlaws" (1996, Miklós Jancsó). ♦ Oct. 23 at 8: "American Torso" (1975, Gábor Bódy). ♦ Oct. 24 at 11 A.M.: "Sántántangó" (1994, Béla Tarr). ♦ "To Save and Project." Oct. 24 at 8, Oct. 25 at 3, and Oct. 26 at 4:30: "A Woman Under the Influence" (1974, John Cassavetes). ♦ Oct. 25 at 1: "Nanook of the North" (1922, Robert Flaherty; silent). ♦ Oct. 25 at 6: "Le Amiche" ("The Girlfriends") (†). ♦ Oct. 26 at 8: "Senso" (†). ♦ "Thanouser: 100 Years." Oct. 26 at 7: A



A photograph of Burt Rutan's White Knight aircraft, in "Design USA: Contemporary Innovation," at the Cooper-Hewitt.

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"The Iron Curtain: Czech Cinema since the Velvet Revolution." All films are in Czech. Oct. 23 at 2 and Oct. 25 at 7: "The Ferrari Dino Girl" (2009, Jan Nemecek) and "The Kind Revolution" (1990, Jirí Strecha and Petr Slavík). ♦ Oct. 23 at 4:15: "Loves of a Blonde" (1965, Milos Forman). ♦ Oct. 23 at 6:30: "Citizen Havel" (2008, Pavel Koutecky and Miroslav Janek). ♦ Oct. 23 at 9:10: "Something Like Happiness" (2005, Bohdan Slama). ♦ Oct. 24 at 8 and Oct. 27 at 4: "The Return of the Idiot" (1999, Sasa Gedeon). ♦ Oct. 25 at 12:30: "Ecstasy" (1933, Gustav Machaty). ♦ Oct. 25 at 2:20: "Divided We Fall" (2000, Jan Hřebejk). ♦ Oct. 25 at 9:15: "Voyage to the End of the Universe" (1963, Jindrich Polák). ♦ Oct. 27 at 2:15 "Daisies" (1966, Vera Chytilová).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Fabrice Luchini. All films are in French. Oct. 27 at 12:30 and 7:30: "Keep It Quiet" (1999, Benoît Jacquot). ♦ Oct. 24 at 4: "The Girl from Monaco" (2008, Anne Fontaine).

program of short films produced between 1909 and 1918 by the now defunct Thanouser Studios.

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Oct. 23 at 9:30: "Bad Education" (2004, Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish).

READINGS AND TALKS

"RUST/RIVER"

Jessica DuLong, who is one of the world's only female fireboat engineers (she works aboard the John J. Harvey), reads from her new book, "My River Chronicles: Rediscovering America on the Hudson," at the Atlantic gallery. It is currently displaying a thematically appropriate show, "Rust Never Sleeps," Pamela Talese's oil paintings of the decaying vessels and structures in and around the Brooklyn Navy Yard. (135 W. 29th St., Suite 601. 212-219-3183. Oct. 21 at 6.)

THE NEW SALON IN QUEENS

Alice Quinn, the executive director of the Poetry Society of America, talks with the poet Yusef Komun-

yakaa. (Benjamin Rosenthal Library, Room 230, Queens College. For more information, visit www.qc.edu or call 212-254-9628. Oct. 21 at 6.)

"KNOPF: THEN AND NOW"

Carol Devine Carson, Barbara de Wilde, Archie Ferguson, and Chip Kidd—the long-running design group at Knopf—gather onstage for the first time to discuss their work. The writer Peter Terzian moderates. (Tishman Auditorium, New School, 66 W. 12th St. For more information, visit www.aigany.org. Oct. 21 at 6:30.)

E. L. DOCTOROW

The novelist reads from his latest work, "Homer & Langley." Jonathan Safran Foer will provide the introduction. (Kimmel Center, New York University, 60 Washington Sq. S. No tickets necessary. Oct. 22 at 8.)

BARNES & NOBLE

Françoise Mouly, the art editor for this magazine, talks with R. Crumb about his latest work, "The Book of Genesis Illustrated." (33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 23 at 7.)

BIRDSONG COLLECTIVE

The Brooklyn-based arts collective presents the poet Rebecca Wolff. There will also be music, an art show, and additional readings by members of the collective. (HiChristina Gallery, 632 Grand St. For more information, visit www.birdsongmag.com. Oct. 24 at 8.)

THOM GUNN TRIBUTES

Two events honor the late poet. Oct. 27 at 7: John Peck, Joshua Weiner, and Brian Teare talk about his work. (Poets House, 10 River Terrace, at Murray St. www.poetshouse.org). Oct. 28 at 7: Alfred Corn, Elaine Equi, Wendy Lesser, Robert Pinsky, Robert Polito, Tom Sleight, and Joshua Weiner read from Gunn's poetry. (New School, 55 W. 13th St. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BIG APPLE CIRCUS

Manhattan's one-ring wonder returns for the season, starting Oct. 22. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. For more information, visit www.bigapplecircus.org. Through Jan. 18.)

"BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE BOOKS"

This is the two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the publication of "Candide," Voltaire's brilliantly entertaining philosophical novel, and the New York Public Library is marking the occasion with an exhibition featuring the original manuscript and all seventeen of the known 1759 editions of the work. The show, which will explore the influence of "Candide" on other works, will also include material from the 1956 Broadway musical based on the book, as well as contemporary translations and examples of its adaptation into modern dance, film, and graphic novels. (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 917-275-6975. Oct. 23-April 25.)

"ABCYZ"

This collaborative exhibition of work associated with local contemporary-art collectives, not-for-profit art groups, and other organizations features art made or selected by more than thirty groups and curators, including Bruce High Quality Foundation University, 179 Canal, and the YES Gallery. (Silvershed, 119 W. 25th St. For more information, visit www.abcyz.org. Oct. 24-25, from 1 to 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Just in time to coincide with the Metropolitan Museum's "Art of the Samurai" exhibit—which will explore the rigorously disciplined and highly aesthetic life of the samurai warrior—two auction houses present specialized Japanese sales this week. At Christie's, suits of armor, helmets, and razor-sharp swords will share the podium in an auction on Oct. 23 that

boasts a full set of horse armor, including a mask (modelled in the shape of a dragon's head), a neck protector, chain mail, and straw sandals. This sale is preceded by two auctions of jewelry on Oct. 21, the first of which boasts some spectacular diamonds, including one 32.01-carat specimen known as the Annenberg Diamond, from the collection of the late Leonore Annenberg, the philanthropist and society doyenne. On Oct. 22, the house will auction off silver and virtu, including a group of objects from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the collection of the recently shuttered London shop Marks Antiques. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Bonhams will offer a hundred lots of samurai-related objects on Oct. 22, mostly swords, ornate *tsuba* (sword guards), helmets, and full suits of armor ornamented with gold, multicolored lacquer, and, often, boar's bristles. (580 Madison Ave. 212-644-9001.) ♦ Sotheby's offers a sale focussed on nineteenth-century furniture and decorative objects (Oct. 21) and then another with paintings of the same period, including three characteristically placid, pleasing paintings by Bouguereau, all of children (Oct. 22). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Swann looks back to the earliest days of photography in its sale of photographs and photo books on Oct. 22, which features several mid-nineteenth-century salted-paper prints by William Henry Fox Talbot, the man who discovered and developed the calotype process, the use of a negative from which multiple prints could be made. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE CAN'T HURRY LOVE

Nov. 7

The Apollo Theatre kicks off a national tour of the 1981 musical "Dreamgirls," which follows the rise and fall of a sixties girl group, with music by Henry Krieger and lyrics by Tom Eychen. Robert Longbottom directs and choreographs. (212-531-5305.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND FOOD FIGHT

Nov. 9

The Web site Food52.com is running a Tournament

of Cookbooks, in which sixteen cookbooks compete for top honors. The tournament ends with a celebration at the Astor Center, featuring a panel discussion with authors and chefs. (www.food52.com.)

ART THIS OLD 'HAUS

Nov. 8-Jan. 25

It's been sixty-one years since MOMA's last major show about Germany's Bauhaus school, whose interdisciplinary approach still holds sway among young artists today. The museum's second show on the subject, "Bauhaus

1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity," is a blockbuster, with more than four hundred works. (212-708-9400.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC MEN OF LA MANCHA

Nov. 11

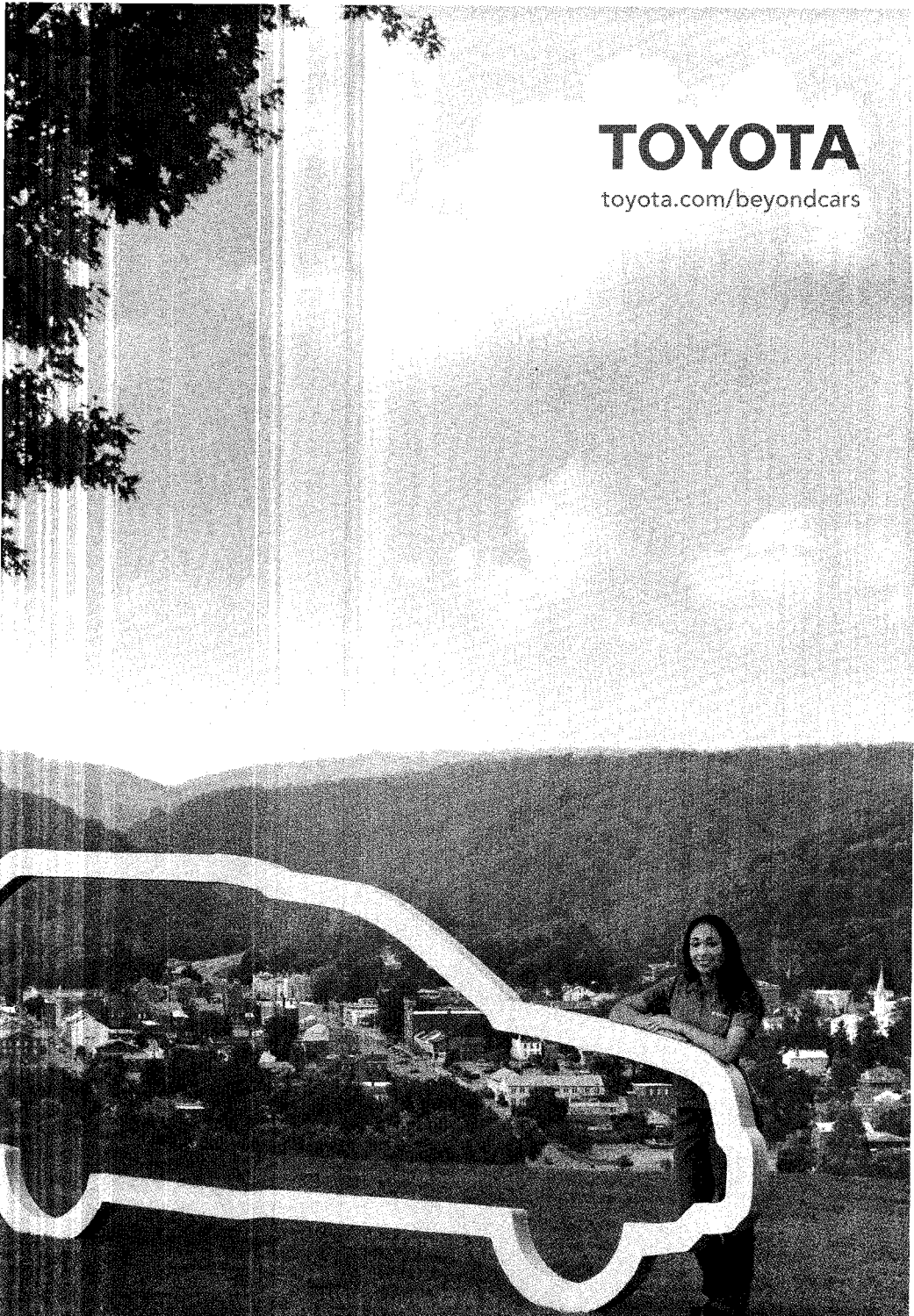
The 92nd Street Y's eclectic "Art of the Guitar" series has carved out a well-deserved niche. One of its offerings comes courtesy of the superb Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, which with the actor Phil Proctor performs an adaptation of "Don Quixote," richly woven with music from medieval and Renaissance Spain. (212-415-5500.)

MOVIES FREAKS AND GEEKS

Nov. 18-April 26

Tim Burton turned fifty this year; it's been twenty-four years since his first feature, "Pee-wee's Big Adventure." MOMA offers a complete retrospective of Burton's work that includes features like "Edward Scissorhands," "Ed Wood," "Beetlejuice," and "Sleepy Hollow"; his student films; and a gallery exhibit featuring his writings, storyboards, paintings, puppets, and childhood drawings. (212-708-9480.)

Tournament of Cookbooks, at the Astor Center.



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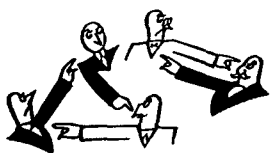
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT WAR AND POLITICS



Over the summer, the Afghan Taliban's military committee distributed "A Book of Rules," in Pashto, to its fighters. The book's eleven chapters seem to draw from the population-centric principles of F.M. 3-24, the U.S. Army's much publicized counter-insurgency field manual, released in 2006. Henceforth, the Taliban guide declares, suicide bombers must take "the utmost steps . . . to avoid civilian human loss." Commanders should generally insure the "safety and security of the civilian's life and property." Also, lest anxious Afghan parents get the wrong idea, Taliban guerrillas should avoid hanging around with beardless young boys and should particularly refrain from "keeping them in camps."

The manual might be risible if the Taliban's coercive insurgency were not so effective. Afghanistan's self-absorbed President, Hamid Karzai, might even consider leafing through it; if he could account for his citizenry's appetite for justice and security half as adaptively as his enemies do, Barack Obama would not be struggling so hard to locate the "good war" he pledged to win during his campaign for the White House.

Afghanistan's deterioration cannot be blamed on one man, and certainly not on Karzai. After the Taliban's fall, he was a

symbol of national unity in a broken land—for several years, he was perhaps the only Afghan leader able to attract the simultaneous confidence of northern Tajik militias, southern Pashtun tribes, and international aid donors. The landslide he won in the 2004 election truly reflected his standing.

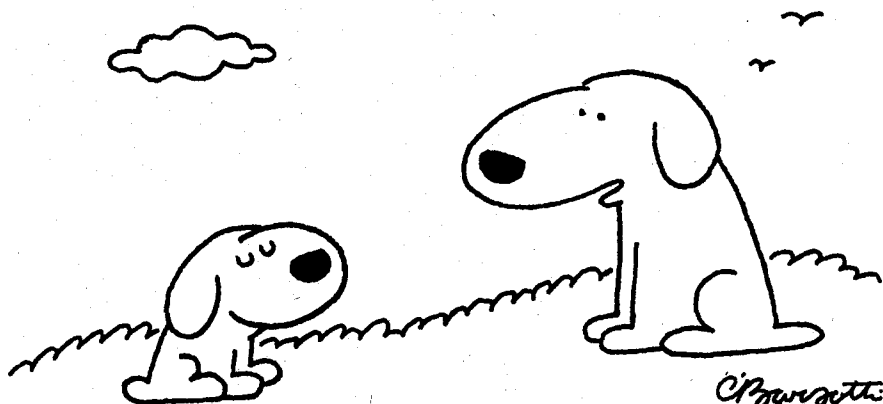
Gradually, however, Karzai seemed to succumb to palace fever and corruption. An unfortunate blend of ego and passivity hobbled him; he could neither manage the American presence in his country nor turn its failures to his advantage by remaking himself as a convincing nationalist. For years, the Bush Administration accepted Karzai's limitations, and did nothing to create conditions from which a plausible alternative might emerge. In 2008, as another election approached, President

Bush's advisers at last sensed trouble; some of them considered trying to dump Karzai. In the end, however, Bush chose a policy of neutrality, which the incoming Obama Administration endorsed.

There is no sugarcoating how Karzai played his hand: he or his backers tried to rig the election on August 20th, a day on which several million of his countrymen defied Taliban threats of violence to attend the polls. Recently, after weeks of equivocating, the head of the United Nations mission in Kabul, Kai Eide, of Norway, admitted that the vote had been marred by "widespread fraud." (The U.N. had earlier fired Eide's American deputy, Peter Galbraith, for chasing this conclusion too vigorously.) U.N. voter-turnout estimates show that most of the fraud occurred in Karzai's strongholds and lifted his tally far more than any other candidate's. In southern Helmand Province, for example, the U.N. estimates suggest that Karzai's campaign may have manufactured more than seventy thousand fake votes; in Kandahar, a hundred and twenty thousand; in Paktika, a hundred and sixty thousand. From June through August, nearly two hundred coalition soldiers died in military operations designed in part to create security for the election.

Karzai's apparent betrayal has the capacity to shock, but it would be a mistake to overemphasize his failings, just as it was an error to overemphasize his early successes. American interests in Afghanistan—namely, the disablement of Al Qaeda along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and the pursuit of a region





"Get all the mileage out of cute while you can."

free from the threat of Taliban revolution—should not be wholly confused with the quest for an honest President in Kabul, where rulers have not often been trustworthy.

A second round of voting now looks probable; it could help calm the country, or it could make things worse. In any event, the election is not yet an utter catastrophe. Two years ago, in Kenya, Mwai Kibaki allegedly stole his reelection to the Presidency, and the country erupted in mass riots and militia killings. In June, Iran's fraud-riddled vote ignited a protest movement with revolutionary ambitions. In Afghanistan, despite possibly decisive fraud, the opposition has barely thrown a rock. Abdullah Abdullah, the aggrieved second-place finisher, just holds press conferences in his garden.

It goes without saying that Afghans have had enough of violence. Abdullah's restraint signals a broader, resilient desire among many political and tribal leaders to avoid having their country descend into chaos again. This is the opening that American policy has repeatedly failed to grasp since the Taliban's fall in late 2001: an opportunity to reject the false expediency of warlords and indispensable men, in favor of deepening participatory, Afghan-led political reform and national reconciliation.

In tandem with a decision about troop levels, the Obama Administration requires an ambitious political strategy for Afghanistan, one that will seize upon the willingness of opposition leaders to negotiate even with a tainted President Karzai about an array of national questions. These include how electoral fraud might be pre-

vented in the future; whether provincial governors should be elected rather than appointed at the President's whim; how ethnic balance can be assured as the country's Army and police force grow; whether political parties should be encouraged; whether the 2004 constitution should be revised to strengthen parliament; how local government can be improved; how corrupt or drug-dealing government officials should be brought to account; and how Taliban foot soldiers and leaders might be encouraged to forswear violent revolution for constitutional politics.

It is not the specifics of these talks that matter most; it is the prospective project of continuous Afghan-led negotiations, formal and informal, amply resourced with money, international attention, and supportive expertise. Some of these projects, such as the establishment of local rehabilitation centers for defecting low-level Taliban fighters, demand urgent investments, within months.

Such political work will be no more certain to succeed than anything else in Afghanistan. Karzai will resist encroachments upon his authority; efforts to satisfy northern groups such as those aligned with Abdullah will conflict with efforts to pacify the Taliban, who are rooted in the south and the east. It is essential work, nonetheless—counter-insurgency campaigns rarely prevail unless military deployments are intimately connected with political negotiations.

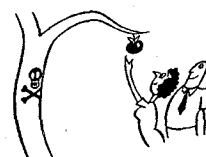
Since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, in 1979, attempts by foreign powers to shape events there have repeatedly been thwarted by what intelligence analysts call "mirror imaging," which is

the tendency of decision-makers in one country to judge counterparts in another through the prism of their own language and politics. The Politburo, for example, engaged in energetic debates about the extent to which Afghanistan might conform to the stages of revolutionary development contemplated in Marxist-Leninist theory.

As the Obama war cabinet now debates its choices, American discourse barely refers to Afghan leaders by name or to the particular equations of the country's diverse provinces. Instead, historical analogies and abstract concepts from political-theory texts abound—arguments about "legitimacy" and "governance," as if the Taliban were motivated primarily by the "Rights of Man." Obama and his advisers might profitably consult the Democratic Party's own book of rules, specifically an entry composed by a peaceable boss from Massachusetts: All politics is local. In the case of Afghanistan, there is a corollary: All local progress, or failure, will be political.

—Steve Coll

ART'S SAKE DEPT. FORBIDDEN FRUIT



The three-week citywide performance-art festival Performa begins next week, opening not with a dinner but with a "food event": "a series of food installations and happenings," according to the invitation, "that will lead guests"—Cindy Sherman, Mario Batali—"on an interactive food journey." The event, which will take place at an art space called X Initiative, on West Twenty-second Street, was created by Jennifer Rubell, a member of the art-collecting, hotel-owning clan. Rubell, a former food columnist, has done food installations before. For "Breakfast" (2007), at her family's museum in Miami, she presented guests with a pile of two thousand hard-boiled eggs, two thousand strips of bacon, and surgical gloves.

The Performa event will be called "Creation," a theme, Rubell explained the other day, that is both a play on the book of Genesis and "a light stand-in for the act

of creation in general." Rubell, who is thirty-nine, was in her car, driving to the North Fork of Long Island to pick out a critical part of the dessert course: three large apple trees, which will be chopped down, brought to the gallery, and laid out on the floor, so that guests can eat fruit from the branches. Rubell acknowledged that some people might find it disturbing to eat fruit from a chopped-down apple tree. "It feels like there's a PETA problem with what I'm doing," she said. "Even the guy at the tree-moving service said, 'Let me get this straight: you're *killing* the tree?' There's definitely an anthropomorphic quality to the whole project."

But this was the point—"I wanted people to be forced to examine why they're so concerned about killing an apple tree," Rubell said. To heighten the effect, she'd looked for the most Biblical trees possible. "I wanted them to be really old trees—a hundred years old," she said. "I wanted the intensity of the age to be explicit." Calling around to apple farmers upstate, she encountered a problem: farmers tend to grow young trees, which are better for harvesting. The most Edenic apple-growing conditions that Rubell found were on Long Island. A little after four, she pulled up in front of an establishment called Wickham's Fruit Farm, which has belonged to the family of its owner, Tom Wickham, for thirteen generations. Wickham was out front, wearing glasses and a dust-covered blue sweatshirt. He greeted Rubell, who has long black hair, and wore a black sweater and knee-high copper-colored boots, and they got in his truck and went out to the orchard.

It was a misty afternoon. Half-eaten apples lay on the ground, left by the Columbus Day pick-your-own crowds. Wickham pointed out new apple varieties—Empire, Razor, Jonagold. "I think the trees where it's most likely you'll still have apples two weeks from now are Braeburn," he said. "It's very light but will still be nice, the fruit not overripe." But Rubell zeroed in on a row of Red Delicious. The trees were twenty-one years old, and about fifteen feet tall, and the fruit was very dark.

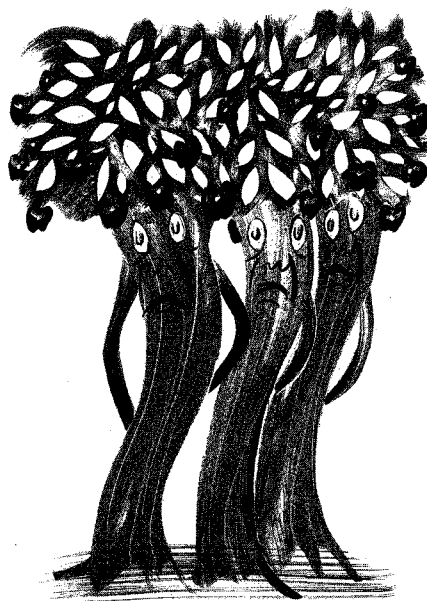
"I have to say, looking at it, even though it's not the apple I prefer, it's the more iconic apple," Rubell said.

Wickham cringed. "It's the worst apple on our farm," he said. "If the customers didn't keep asking for them, I wouldn't

grow them. I'm not proud of our Red Delicious." Still, he helped pick out some tall trees, including a curved tree at the end of a row, and a tree with big clusters of fruit on its branches. "We occasionally do this—transplant trees—for clients in Greenwich who want an instant orchard," he said. "We did it for Mel Gibson."

"In the old days, trees were huge," Wickham explained. "Ninety-nine per cent of the fruit was high up in the top branches. Then scientists found dwarf trees in Europe. They grafted the rootstock of our trees onto the rootstock of those trees." He pointed to some shrimpy young apple trees, easy for pickers. "Now they're like grapevines."

The chopping will happen like this: the day before the Performa event, Wickham will make an incision in the trunks with a chain saw and, with two farmworkers, will pull them down gently, using a rope, load them onto X-shaped "boat cra-

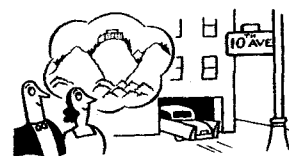


dles" on a trailer, and drive them into the city. He will charge five hundred dollars per tree, plus shipping, and he'll attend Rubell's event the next night. Wickham said that he was fine with being both the grower and the executioner. "A grower has to be brutal and clear about removing old trees," he said. "There's a cycle." He was asked if he ever experienced emotion while cutting down trees, and he pointed to some that he'd planted back in the eighties, when he and his wife had just returned from a stint in Sri Lanka. "We have two or three rows over there of Mutsu, a green apple that has been our livelihood, providing us with apples for

the last twenty years," he said. "They have been wonderful apples, and I have depended on them. It's not like putting a dog to sleep, but I know what these apple trees have done for me."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

FAIRER SEX HAPPY HUNTING



What does a woman want? The question that famously stumped Sigmund Freud—despite, he once complained to Marie Bonaparte, "my thirty years of research into the feminine soul"—has lately been answered by Michael Silverstein, a senior partner at the Boston Consulting Group, in Chicago: Women want to be Swedish. "The best place in the world for women to live is Sweden," Silverstein said the other day, over lunch. "There is virtually no gender discrimination there. Men and women live as equals."

Lunch was at DB Bistro, and what Silverstein wanted was a green salad, followed by the chicken. ("I had dinner at Leonard Lauder's house in August, and Chef Daniel"—Boulud—"was the chef," Silverstein said. "I have met him now twice, and I still have to tell him I am Leon's friend"—Leon Dreimann, the former C.E.O. of Salton, Inc. "You would think—But I guess he meets thousands of people.") Silverstein was in town to discuss his new book, written with Kate Sayre, "Women Want More: How to Capture Your Share of the World's Largest, Fastest-Growing Market." To write it, he and Sayre mined data supplied by twelve thousand women who responded to a B.C.G. questionnaire asking about their spending and saving preferences, their work habits, and their more personal satisfactions. As a result, Silverstein was equipped to scatter his conversation with such alarming statistics as "Globally, thirty-eight per cent of men don't do chores" and "Thirty per cent of American women who are married do not intend to be with the man they are with five years from now."

Silverstein talked about particular findings regarding New York women. "Women in New York have enormous

issues with money, enormous issues with time," he observed. "They are more likely to get divorced, and they are more troubled about finding love." Only seventeen per cent of New York women rate themselves "highly satisfied" with their sex lives, compared with twenty per cent nationally and twenty-five per cent globally. On the other hand, New York women have more friends than anyone else on the planet: the average New Yorker would invite at least sixty-five friends to her wedding, compared with a national average of fifty-nine. Called upon to explain this phenomenon, Silverstein remembered a recent visit to a New York Bikram-yoga studio. "I have been to Bikram yoga all over the country, and this was the friendliest, most conversational, most open yoga class I have ever been to—like, in a different category," he said. "I have been there twice, and the instructor knows me by name. I have been to the studio in Chicago forty times, and the instructor doesn't know me."

Silverstein lived in New York once, briefly, in the seventies, when he worked at U.P.I. "But then I got married, and I went to Harvard Business School." (He thought his wife wanted him to make more money.) That marriage ended in divorce, and Silverstein became a single parent of a young daughter—an experience, he says, that has given him an appreciation for the lives of women. (Still, he has blind spots: he considers sixty-five dollars a lot to pay for a haircut.)

His findings are of interest primarily to C.E.O.s of the kinds of company that hire B.C.G. to help them sell stuff to the women of the world. "I have literally invented billions of dollars of product that is based on listening to women—I can tell you how to turn their dissatisfaction into product response, and how to bring it to marketplace," he said. But he has greater ambitions. Not long ago, he sent Michelle Obama a letter proposing that, given the problems her husband is having with his health-care platform, she should give him a wifely nudge in the direction of Scandinavian-style reform: improving maternal mortality, securing paid parental leave, providing reliable and affordable day care. "I am hoping that she leans over to her husband and says, 'Let's think about this,'" he said. "In the next five years, let's inch our way toward being more like Sweden."

Swedish social policy might be a hard

sell in America—much of the Midwest barely has IKEA—and Silverstein has not heard back from the First Lady on his suggestion. But he is eager to share with her what he learned from his "Swedish angels," as he calls the Swedish women who responded to his poll. "I went to Sweden and I met with these women," he said. "They lead idyllic lives! This concept that you share the parenting, that you take the weekend off! The Swedish woman says, 'We have a house here, but we have something in the country that we go to when we take off the month of July together; my husband goes out and hunts for dinner.' He comes back with dinner, and he has shot it! They are happy. American women don't have anyone hunting for them—that's the real problem."

—Rebecca Mead

REVIVALS SCRUM AGAIN



The last time rugby was played at the Olympics, the Americans won the gold. That was in 1924. A team composed largely of Stanford students made the six-thousand-mile trip to Paris on a lark—the sport wasn't really played in America—and crushed the French in the final, 17–3, prompting a mob of drunken French fans to shower the team with rocks and bottles. And so ended rugby in the Olympics.

Rocks and bottles, of course, could be seen as rugby's natural milieu. In the popular conception of the sport, the muddy dogpile of the game itself is merely a preamble to its extended coda: pig roasts, flowing kegs, and a naked, swaying mass of players chanting the lyrics to "Jesus Can't Play Rugby" and "Bestiality's Best."

Yet, with the International Olympic Committee's recent vote to restore rugby for the 2016 Olympics, in Rio de Janeiro, USA Rugby is working hard to de-rowdize the game. On the afternoon of the I.O.C.'s vote, Al Caravelli, a trim, bald man who coaches the men's national squad, the Eagles, explained his plans to about thirty rugby supporters at a celebration in the West Village. "I've been

smiling since seven-thirty this morning," Caravelli reported, unsmilingly. Then he got down to business: the need to raise money, improve the team's training, retain the gold medal (which America will have held, in a manner of speaking, for ninety-two years), and serve as role models. "We may not be paid full time like players from some of the other nations, but I expect full-time professionalism." Behind him looped an Eagles' highlight reel of sprinting tries and a single thumping tackle. "The choice for players is: 'Do I want to hang out with my frat buddies and get drunk on a Friday night, or go to the gym and put in my two hours? And then get up and put in two hours' running while those buddies are still sleeping in?'"

The version of the game to be played in Rio is rugby sevens, which features seven-man teams rather than the customary fifteen, and fourteen-minute games, rather than eighty. Sevens is faster and higher-scoring and, Caravelli pointed out after his public remarks, ideal for television: "We can guarantee a commercial every seven minutes. It's designed to appeal to young people, and really change the image of the game—open, modern, clean." So why was the celebration being held in a pub called Mr. Dennehy's, and sponsored by Guinness? "That wasn't my decision," he said, tightly.

Gordon Wright, a strapping former rugger player who was helping to orchestrate publicity, suggested, with a pint of Guinness in his hand, that rebranding the sport would take time. "It's a game played by violent gentlemen, a shockingly violent game played with a high degree of civility," he said. "Golf"—the other sport admitted to the 2016 Olympics—"has plaid pants and ex-Presidents. We have scrums and rucks and mauls." Mark Bokhoven, a six-foot-four-inch, two-hundred-and-twenty-five-pound Eagle, noted that over the years he'd ripped his anterior cruciate ligament, stress-fractured his tibia, and torn the abdominal muscle off his pubis bone. You can't play rugby with five-pack abs.

Among the blazer-wearing elder statesmen present was the Reverend B. J. Weber, a rugby coach at Columbia University and a former chaplain for the New York Yankees. Weber took up the game at Iowa State University, in 1967,

after becoming involved in the antiwar movement—in those days, rugby was a countercultural statement. “I’ve never seen better-conditioned athletes than on the rugby field,” he said. “The average N.F.L. player plays only minutes a game. He wouldn’t last in rugby—he simply lacks the fitness, speed, and courage.” He added, “Fifteen for eighty, fifteen for eighty!” astounded at the fact that fifteen men could sprint and tackle full out for eighty minutes. But isn’t this rugby sevens? Weber shrugged, tried out “Seven for fourteen!” and shrugged again, glumly.

Jen Sinkler plays for the women’s Eagles sevens, a team tied for third in the world, eight spots higher than the American men. She said that sevens was ideally suited to the physical, individual, striving American temperament. But she wondered whether, in the push to reposition both the game and its culture, something vital might not have been lost. “The Maori sevens team from New Zealand, Aotearoa—which means ‘Long White Cloud’—sings beautiful songs at our tournaments’ closing banquets,” she said. “And Saudi Arabia always puts on a good show. But we’ve ended up singing things like ‘Row, Row, Row Your Boat,’ which only confirms our reputation as gauche Americans.” Sinkler frowned, mentally adding to the to-do list for the next seven years: “We’ve got to work on our banquet-presentation skills.”

—Tad Friend

THE BOARDS THE RAIN IN SPAIN



Dear Etiquette Guy:
Help! I just married a tycoon and suddenly I have a houseful of servants to supervise. I am often uncertain how to behave toward them. There’s the maid, the groundskeeper, the wine steward—what’s a modern lady of the house to do?

—Anxious in Aspen

Dear Anxious:

Thank you for your letter. This is a more common problem than you might

expect. I refer you to the case of Sienna Miller, the star of “After Miss Julie,” Patrick Marber’s adaptation of the August Strindberg classic. Playing the title character—a young aristocrat who has an affair with her chauffeur, in the nineteen-forties—Miss Miller faced this very dilemma. So the Roundabout hired an etiquette coach: Frank Ventura, who has consulted on manners for “The Way of the World” (set in 1700), “The Constant Wife” (1926), and “Top Girls” (1982), and who is serving as Miss Miller’s personal Emily Post.

“Etiquette is behavior between people that establishes a relationship,” Mr. Ventura said recently, during a post-rehearsal discussion. “It sets the rules of the society.” For example: when Miss Julie enters her servants’ quarters, they know to drop everything and stand at attention. “Face her, maintain eye contact,” Marin Ireland, who plays the cook, explained. Domestics must also maintain the proper proximity. Say the cook was lighting her lady’s cigarette. “She would be striking the match away from her, so the flint wouldn’t shoot at her,” Mr. Ventura said. When pouring the lady a drink, the servant would turn his back, sparing her the sight of exertion. “More respectful, less familiar,” Miss Miller, who was wearing studded suede boots, explained.

That covers the servants. But what about the lady? “She would have learned several languages,” Mr. Ventura said. “She would have understood the history of the country. She would understand economics. She would have been prepared at any moment to sit at a banquet and have a conversation with the gentleman on either side of her.”

Mr. Ventura offered a few simple ground rules: When ashing a cigarette, tap it lightly with your index finger. When approaching a chair, don’t just plop yourself down: circle it first and lower yourself gracefully. You will be carrying a handkerchief—do not wipe your nose with it! Apply a fragrance and dab yourself lightly on the neck. While flirting with your chauffeur, it is permitted to flick the hankie gently in his face, but, in all other respects, use restraint. “My tendency is to bite things, which the character obviously wouldn’t do,” Miss Miller said.

Finally, there is the matter of pos-

ture. “Frank makes me walk around with a book on my head,” Miss Miller said. Upon polite insistence, she agreed to a demonstration. Luckily, Mr. Ventura had a copy of “The Modern Gentleman” in his bag. (“How brilliant!” Miss Miller exclaimed. “Is that your porn?”) She placed it on her head and paced the dressing room flawlessly.



Sienna Miller

“Bravo!” Mr. Ventura said.

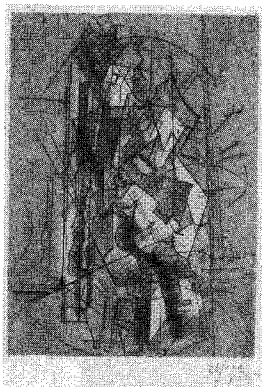
Afterward, Mr. Ventura headed outside for some field work. At a Barnes & Noble café, he ordered an Earl Grey tea. The barista (courteous, but not great with eye contact) told him to look for sugar at the end of the bar. “See, now we have to self-serve,” Mr. Ventura said. “Sometimes you don’t see the rules of etiquette until they’re broken.” According to the social norms of Barnes & Noble, he pointed out, it is acceptable to loiter in the aisles for hours. Nearby, a girl was sitting on the floor working on her laptop, blocking the merchandise. “Excuse me?” Mr. Ventura said, hovering over her. “Totally unconscious!” he said, after she shifted a bit.

As for Miss Miller, her coach had one last piece of advice: “Your best friends are your dresser, the stagehand, and the follow-spot guy. Don’t treat him like the follow-spot guy. You treat him like the most important guy in your life.”

Respectfully yours,
The Etiquette Guy

—Michael Schulman

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE PREDATOR WAR

What are the risks of the C.I.A.'s covert drone program?

BY JANE MAYER

On August 5th, officials at the Central Intelligence Agency, in Langley, Virginia, watched a live video feed relaying closeup footage of one of the most wanted terrorists in Pakistan. Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Taliban in Pakistan, could be seen reclining on the rooftop of his father-in-law's house, in Zanghara, a hamlet in South Waziristan. It was a hot summer night, and he was joined outside by his wife and his uncle, a medic; at one point, the remarkably crisp images showed that Mehsud, who suffered from diabetes and a kidney ailment, was receiving an intravenous drip.

The video was being captured by the infrared camera of a Predator drone, a remotely controlled, unmanned plane that had been hovering, undetected, two miles or so above the house. Pakistan's Interior Minister, A. Rehman Malik, told me recently that Mehsud was resting on his back. Malik, using his hands to make a picture frame, explained that the Predator's targeters could see Mehsud's entire body, not just the top of his head. "It was a perfect picture," Malik, who watched the videotape later, said. "We used to see James Bond movies where he talked into his shoe or his watch. We thought it was a fairy tale. But this was fact!" The image remained just as stable when the C.I.A. remotely launched two Hellfire missiles from the Predator. Authorities watched the fiery blast in real time. After the dust cloud dissipated, all that remained of Mehsud was a detached torso. Eleven others died: his wife, his father-in-law, his mother-in-law, a lieutenant, and seven bodyguards.

Pakistan's government considered Mehsud its top enemy, holding him responsible for the vast majority of recent terrorist attacks inside the country, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, in December, 2007, and the bombing, last September, of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, which killed more than fifty people. Mehsud was

also thought to have helped his Afghan confederates attack American and coalition troops across the border. Roger Cressey, a former counterterrorism official on the National Security Council, who is now a partner at Good Harbor, a consulting firm, told me, "Mehsud was someone both we and Pakistan were happy to see go up in smoke." Indeed, there was no controversy when, a few days after the missile strike, CNN reported that President Barack Obama had authorized it.

However, at about the same time, there was widespread anger after the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that during the Bush Administration the C.I.A. had considered setting up hit squads to capture or kill Al Qaeda operatives around the world. The furor grew when the *Times* reported that the C.I.A. had turned to a private contractor to help with this highly sensitive operation: the controversial firm Blackwater, now known as Xe Services. Members of the Senate and House intelligence committees demanded investigations of the program, which, they said, had been hidden from them. And many legal experts argued that, had the program become fully operational, it would have violated a 1976 executive order, signed by President Gerald R. Ford, banning American intelligence forces from engaging in assassination.

Hina Shamsi, a human-rights lawyer at the New York University School of Law, was struck by the inconsistency of the public's responses. "We got so upset about a targeted-killing program that didn't happen," she told me. "But the drone program *exists*." She said of the Predator program, "These are targeted international killings by the state." The program, as it happens, also uses private contractors for a variety of tasks, including flying the drones. Employees of Xe Services maintain and load the Hellfire missiles on the aircraft. Vicki Divoll, a former C.I.A. lawyer, who now teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy, in Annapolis, ob-



The “push-button” approach to fighting Al Qaeda represents a radically new use of state-sanctioned lethal force.

served, “People are a lot more comfortable with a Predator strike that kills many people than with a throat-slitting that kills one.” But, she added, “mechanized killing is still killing.”

The U.S. government runs two drone programs. The military’s version, which is publicly acknowledged, operates in the recognized war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq, and targets enemies of U.S. troops stationed there. As such, it is an extension of conventional warfare. The C.I.A.’s program is aimed at terror suspects around the world, including in countries where U.S. troops are not based. It was initiated by the Bush Administration and, according to Juan Zarate, a counterterrorism adviser in the Bush White House, Obama has left in place virtually all the key personnel. The program is classified as covert, and the intelligence agency declines to provide any information to the public about where it operates, how it selects targets, who is in charge, or how many people have been killed.

Nevertheless, reports of fatal air strikes in Pakistan emerge every few days. Such stories are often secondhand and difficult to confirm, as the Pakistani government and the military have tried to wall off the tribal areas from journalists. But, even if a precise account is elusive, the outlines are clear: the C.I.A. has joined the Pakistani intelligence service in an aggressive campaign to eradicate local and foreign militants, who have taken refuge in some of the most inaccessible parts of the country.

The first two C.I.A. air strikes of the Obama Administration took place on the morning of January 23rd—the President’s third day in office. Within hours, it was clear that the morning’s bombings, in Pakistan, had killed an estimated twenty people. In one strike, four Arabs, all likely affiliated with Al Qaeda, died. But in the second strike a drone targeted the wrong house, hitting the residence of a pro-government tribal leader six miles outside the town of Wana, in South Waziristan. The blast killed the tribal leader’s entire family, including three chil-

dren, one of them five years old. In keeping with U.S. policy, there was no official acknowledgment of either strike.

Since then, the C.I.A. bombardments have continued at a rapid pace. According to a just completed study by the New America Foundation, the number of drone strikes has risen dramatically since Obama became President. During his first nine and a half months in office, he has authorized as many C.I.A. aerial attacks in Pakistan as George W. Bush did in his final three years in office. The study’s authors, Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, report that the Obama Administration has sanctioned at least forty-one C.I.A. missile strikes in Pakistan since taking office—a rate of approximately one bombing a week. So far this year, various estimates suggest, the C.I.A. attacks have killed between three hundred and twenty-six and five hundred and thirty-eight people. Critics say that many of the victims have been innocent bystanders, including children.

In the last week of September alone,



S. GROSS

"He works and plays well with others."

there were reportedly four such attacks—three of them in one twenty-four-hour period. At any given moment, a former White House counterterrorism official says, the C.I.A. has multiple drones flying over Pakistan, scouting for targets. According to the official, "there are so many drones" in the air that arguments have erupted over which remote operators can claim which targets, provoking "command-and-control issues."

General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, the defense contractor that manufactures the Predator and its more heavily armed sibling, the Reaper, can barely keep up with the government's demand. The Air Force's fleet has grown from some fifty drones in 2001 to nearly two hundred; the C.I.A. will not divulge how many drones it operates. The government plans to commission hundreds more, including new generations of tiny "nano" drones, which can fly after their prey like

a killer bee through an open window.

With public disenchantment mounting over the U.S. troop deployment in Afghanistan, and the Obama Administration divided over whether to escalate the American military presence there, many in Washington support an even greater reliance on Predator strikes. In this view, the U.S., rather than trying to stabilize Afghanistan by waging a counter-insurgency operation against Taliban forces, should focus purely on counterterrorism, and use the latest technology to surgically eliminate Al Qaeda leaders and their allies. In September, the conservative pundit George Will published an influential column in the *Washington Post*, "Time to Get Out of Afghanistan," arguing that "America should do only what can be done from offshore, using intelligence, drones, cruise missiles, air strikes and small, potent Special Forces units, concentrating on the porous 1,500-mile bor-

der with Pakistan, a nation that actually matters." Vice-President Joseph Biden reportedly holds a similar view.

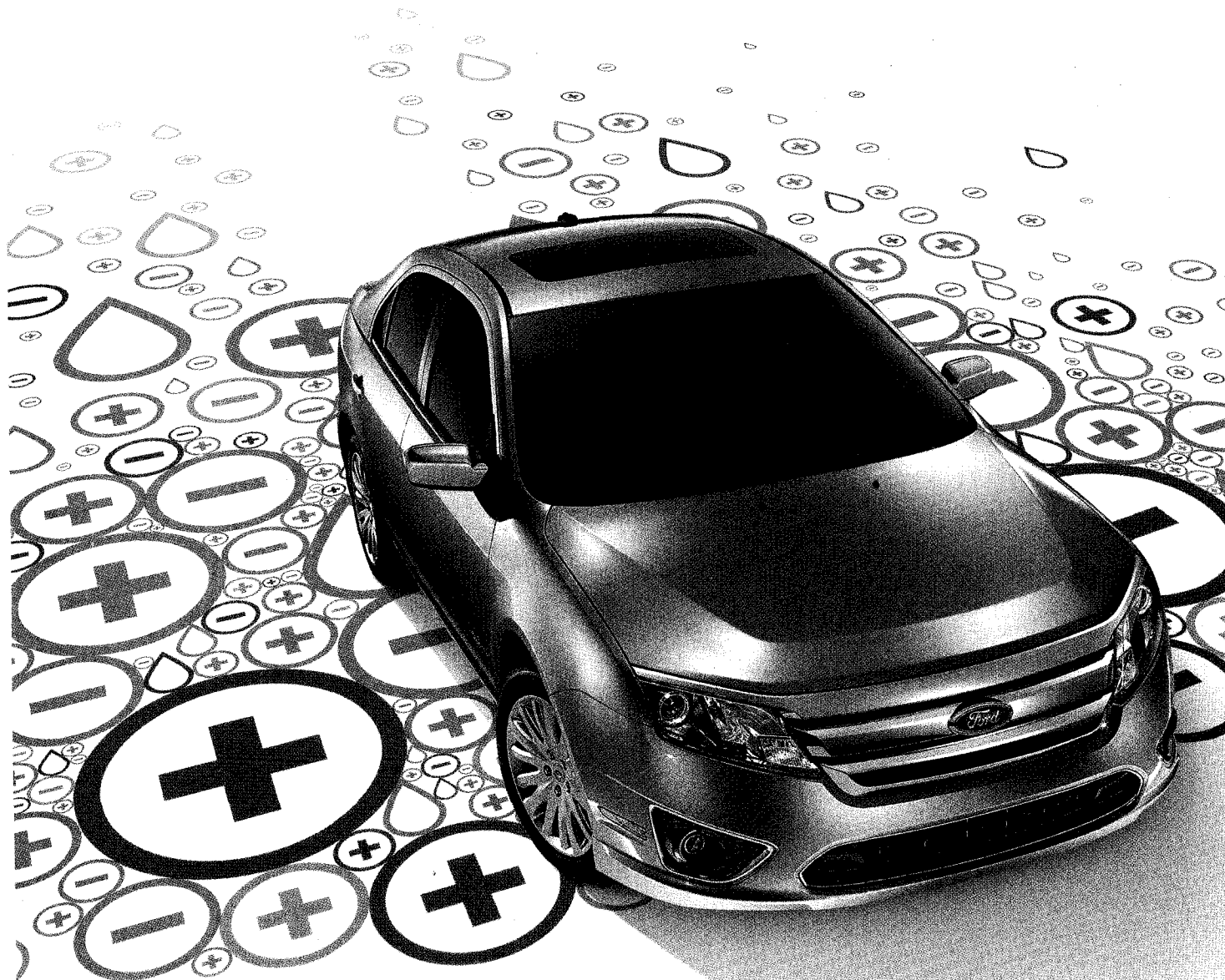
It's easy to understand the appeal of a "push-button" approach to fighting Al Qaeda, but the embrace of the Predator program has occurred with remarkably little public discussion, given that it represents a radically new and geographically unbounded use of state-sanctioned lethal force. And, because of the C.I.A. program's secrecy, there is no visible system of accountability in place, despite the fact that the agency has killed many civilians inside a politically fragile, nuclear-armed country with which the U.S. is not at war. Should something go wrong in the C.I.A.'s program—last month, the Air Force lost control of a drone and had to shoot it down over Afghanistan—it's unclear what the consequences would be.

The Predators in the C.I.A. program are "flown" by civilians, both intelligence officers and private contractors. According to a former counterterrorism official, the contractors are "seasoned professionals—often retired military and intelligence officials." (The intelligence agency outsources a significant portion of its work.) Within the C.I.A., control of the unmanned vehicles is split among several teams. One set of pilots and operators works abroad, near hidden airfields in Afghanistan and Pakistan, handling takeoffs and landings. Once the drones are aloft, the former counterterrorism official said, the controls are electronically "slewed over" to a set of "reachback operators," in Langley. Using joysticks that resemble video-game controls, the reachback operators—who don't need conventional flight training—sit next to intelligence officers and watch, on large flat-screen monitors, a live video feed from the drone's camera. From their suburban redoubt, they can turn the plane, zoom in on the landscape below, and decide whether to lock onto a target. A stream of additional "signal" intelligence, sent to Langley by the National Security Administration, provides electronic means of corroborating that a target has been correctly identified. The White House has delegated trigger authority to C.I.A. officials, including the head of the Counter-Terrorist Center, whose identity remains veiled from the public because the agency has placed him under cover.

People who have seen an air strike live

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on a monitor described it as both awe-inspiring and horrifying. "You could see these little figures scurrying, and the explosion going off, and when the smoke cleared there was just rubble and charred stuff," a former C.I.A. officer who was based in Afghanistan after September 11th says of one attack. (He watched the carnage on a small monitor in the field.) Human beings running for cover are such a common sight that they have inspired a slang term: "squirters."

Peter W. Singer, the author of "Wired for War," a recent book about the robotics revolution in modern combat, argues that the drone technology is worryingly "seductive," because it creates the perception that war can be "costless." Cut off from the realities of the bombings in Pakistan, Americans have been insulated from the human toll, as well as from the political and the moral consequences. Nearly all the victims have remained faceless, and the damage caused by the bombings has remained unseen. In contrast to Gaza, where the targeted killing of Hamas fighters by the Israeli military has been extensively documented—making clear that the collateral damage, and the loss of civilian life, can be severe—Pakistan's tribal areas have become largely forbidden territory for media organizations. As a result, no videos of a drone attack in progress have been released, and only a few photographs of the immediate aftermath of a Predator strike have been published.

The seeming unreality of the Predator enterprise is also felt by the pilots. Some of them reportedly wear flight suits when they operate a drone's remote controls. When their shifts end, of course, these cubicle warriors can drive home to have dinner with their families. Critics have suggested that unmanned systems, by sparing these combatants from danger and sacrifice, are creating what Sir Brian Burridge, a former British Air Chief Marshal in Iraq, has called "a virtueless war," requiring neither courage nor heroism. According to Singer, some Predator pilots suffer from combat stress that equals, or exceeds, that of pilots in the battlefield. This suggests that virtual killing, for all its sterile trappings, is a discomfiting form of warfare. Meanwhile, some social critics, such as Mary Dudziak, a professor at the University of Southern California's Gould School of Law, argue that the Predator strategy has a larger political cost. As she

puts it, "Drones are a technological step that further isolates the American people from military action, undermining political checks on . . . endless war."

The advent of the Predator targeted-killing program "is really a sea change," says Gary Solis, who teaches at Georgetown University's Law Center and recently retired from running the law program at the U.S. Military Academy. "Not only would we have expressed abhorrence of such a policy a few years ago; we did." In July, 2001, two months before Al Qaeda's attacks on New York and Washington profoundly altered America's mindset, the U.S. denounced Israel's use of targeted killing against Palestinian terrorists. The American Ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, said at the time, "The United States government is very clearly on record as against targeted assassinations. . . . They are extrajudicial killings, and we do not support that."

Before September 11th, the C.I.A., which had been chastened by past assassination scandals, refused to deploy the Predator for anything other than surveillance. Daniel Benjamin, the State Department's counterterrorism director, and Steven Simon, a former counterterrorism adviser, report in their 2002 book "The Age of Sacred Terror" that the week before Al Qaeda attacked the U.S. George Tenet, then the agency's director, argued that it would be "a terrible mistake" for "the Director of Central Intelligence to fire a weapon like this."

Yet once America had suffered terrorist attacks on its own soil the agency's posture changed, and it petitioned the White House for new authority. Within days, President Bush had signed a secret Memorandum of Notification, giving the C.I.A. the right to kill members of Al Qaeda and their confederates virtually anywhere in the world. Congress endorsed this policy, passing a bill called the Authorization for Use of Military Force. Bush's legal advisers modelled their rationale on Israel's position against terrorism, arguing that the U.S. government had the right to use lethal force against suspected terrorists in "anticipatory" self-defense. By classifying terrorism as an act of war, rather than as a crime, the Bush Administration reasoned that it was no longer bound by legal constraints requiring the government

to give suspected terrorists due process.

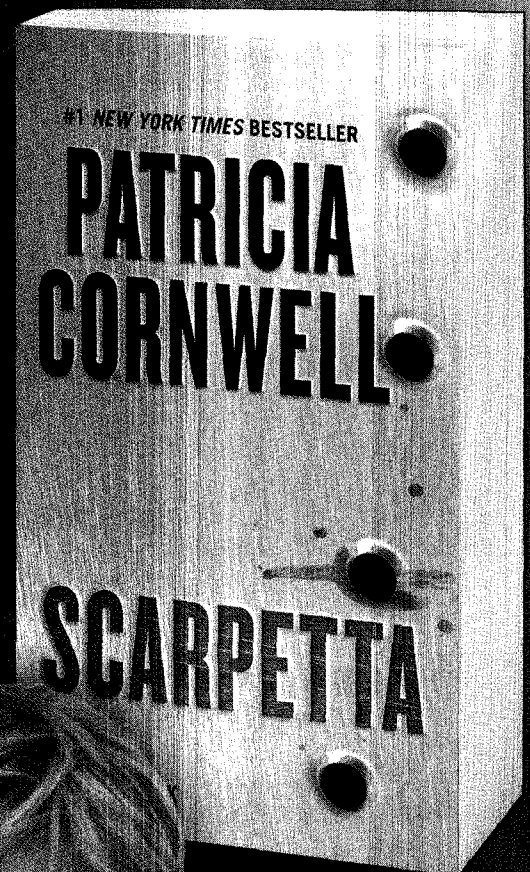
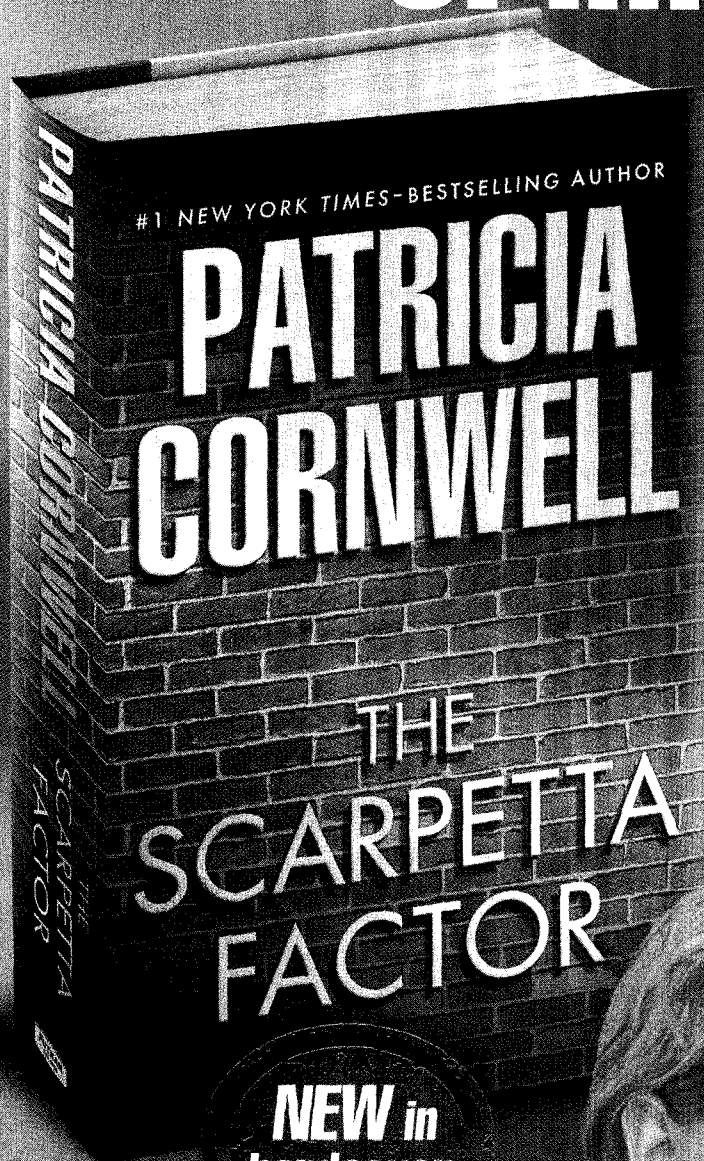
In November, 2002, top Bush Administration officials publicly announced a successful Predator strike against an Al Qaeda target, Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi, a suspect in the 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole. Harethi was killed after a Hellfire missile vaporized the car in which he and five other passengers were riding, on a desert road in Yemen. Paul Wolfowitz, then the Deputy Defense Secretary, praised the new tactic, telling CNN, "One hopes each time that you get a success like that, not only to have gotten rid of somebody dangerous but to have imposed changes in their tactics, operations, and procedures."

At first, some intelligence experts were uneasy about drone attacks. In 2002, Jeffrey Smith, a former C.I.A. general counsel, told Seymour M. Hersh, for an article in this magazine, "If they're dead, they're not talking to you, and you create more martyrs." And, in an interview with the *Washington Post*, Smith said that ongoing drone attacks could "suggest that it's acceptable behavior to assassinate people. . . . Assassination as a norm of international conduct exposes American leaders and Americans overseas."

Seven years later, there is no longer any doubt that targeted killing has become official U.S. policy. "The things we were complaining about from Israel a few years ago we now embrace," Solis says. Now, he notes, nobody in the government calls it assassination.

The Predator program is described by many in the intelligence world as America's single most effective weapon against Al Qaeda. In May, Leon Panetta, the C.I.A.'s director, referred to the Predator program as "the only game in town" in an unguarded moment after a public lecture. Counterterrorism officials credit drones with having killed more than a dozen senior Al Qaeda leaders and their allies in the past year, eliminating more than half of the C.I.A.'s twenty most wanted "high value" targets. In addition to Baitullah Mehsud, the list includes Nazimuddin Zalalov, a former lieutenant of Osama bin Laden; Ilyas Kashmiri, Al Qaeda's chief of paramilitary operations in Pakistan; Saad bin Laden, Osama's eldest son; Abu Sulayman al-Jazairi, an Algerian Al Qaeda planner who is believed to have helped train operatives for attacks in Europe and the United States; and Osama

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al-Kini and Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan, Al Qaeda operatives who are thought to have played central roles in the 1998 bombings of American embassies in East Africa.

Juan Zarate, the Bush counterterrorism adviser, believes that "Al Qaeda is on its heels" partly because "so many bigwigs" have been killed by drones. Though he acknowledges that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the group's top leaders, remain at large, he estimates that no more than fifty members of Al Qaeda's senior leadership still exist, along with two to three hundred senior members outside the terror organization's "inner core."

Zarate and other supporters of the Predator program argue that it has had positive ripple effects. Surviving militants are forced to operate far more cautiously, which diverts their energy from planning new attacks. And there is evidence that the drone strikes, which depend on local informants for targeting information, have caused debilitating suspicion and discord within the ranks. Four Europeans who were captured last December after trying to join Al Qaeda in Pakistan described a life of constant fear and distrust among the militants, whose obsession with drone strikes had led them to communicate only with elaborate secrecy and to leave their squalid hideouts only at night. As the *Times* has reported, militants have been so unnerved by the drone program that they have released a video showing the execution of accused informants. Pakistanis have also been gripped by rumors that paid C.I.A. informants have been planting tiny silicon-chip homing devices for the drones in the tribal areas.

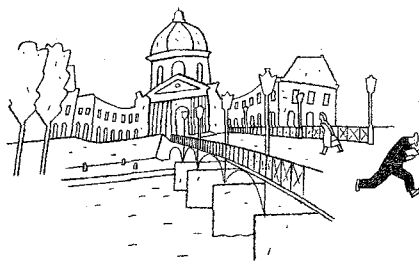
The drone program, for all its tactical successes, has stirred deep ethical concerns. Michael Walzer, a political philosopher and the author of the book "Just and Unjust Wars," says that he is unsettled by the notion of an intelligence agency wielding such lethal power in secret. "Under what code does the C.I.A. operate?" he asks. "I don't know. The military operates under a legal code, and it has judicial mechanisms." He said of the C.I.A.'s drone program, "There should be a limited, finite group of people who are targets, and that list should be publicly defensible and available. Instead, it's not being publicly defended. People are being killed, and we generally

require some public justification when we go about killing people."

Since 2004, Philip Alston, an Australian human-rights lawyer who has served as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, has repeatedly tried, but failed, to get a response to basic questions about the C.I.A.'s program—first from the Bush Administration, and now from Obama's. When he asked, in formal correspondence, for the C.I.A.'s legal justifications for targeted killings, he says, "they blew me off." (A C.I.A. spokesperson told me that the agency "uses lawful, highly accurate, and effective tools and tactics to take the fight to Al Qaeda and its violent allies. That careful, precise approach has brought major success against a very dangerous and deadly enemy.") Alston then presented a critical report on the drone program to the U.N. Human Rights Council, but, he says, the U.S. representatives ignored his concerns.

Alston describes the C.I.A. program as operating in "an accountability void," adding, "It's a lot like the torture issue. You start by saying we'll just go after the handful of 9/11 masterminds. But, once you've put the regimen for waterboarding and other techniques in place, you use it much more indiscriminately. It becomes standard operating procedure. It becomes all too easy. Planners start saying, 'Let's use drones in a broader context.' Once you use targeting less stringently, it can become indiscriminate."

Under international law, in order for the U.S. government to legally target civilian terror suspects abroad it has to define a terrorist group as one engaging in armed conflict, and the use of force must be a "military necessity." There must be no reasonable alternative to killing, such as capture, and to warrant death the target must be "directly participating in hostilities." The use of force has to be considered "proportionate" to the threat. Finally, the foreign nation in which such



targeted killing takes place has to give its permission.

Many lawyers who have looked at America's drone program in Pakistan believe that it meets these basic legal tests. But they are nevertheless troubled, as the U.S. government keeps broadening the definition of acceptable high-value targets. Last March, the Obama Administration made an unannounced decision to win support for the drone program inside Pakistan by giving President Asif Ali Zardari more control over whom to target. "A lot of the targets are nominated by the Pakistanis—it's part of the bargain of getting Pakistani cooperation," says Bruce Riedel, a former C.I.A. officer who has served as an adviser to the Obama Administration on Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to the New America Foundation's study, only six of the forty-one C.I.A. drone strikes conducted by the Obama Administration in Pakistan have targeted Al Qaeda members. Eighteen were directed at Taliban targets in Pakistan, and fifteen were aimed specifically at Baitullah Mehsud. Talat Masood, a retired Pakistani lieutenant general and an authority on security issues, says that the U.S.'s tactical shift, along with the elimination of Mehsud, has quieted some of the Pakistani criticism of the American air strikes, although the bombings are still seen as undercutting the country's sovereignty. But, given that many of the targeted Pakistani Taliban figures were obscure in U.S. counterterrorism circles, some critics have wondered whether they were legitimate targets for a Predator strike. "These strikes are killing a lot of low-level militants, which raises the question of whether they are going beyond the authorization to kill leaders," Peter Bergen told me. Roger Cressey, the former National Security Council official, who remains a strong supporter of the drone program, says, "The debate is that we've been doing this so long we're now bombing low-level guys who don't deserve a Hellfire missile up their ass." (In his view, "Not every target has to be a rock star.")

The Obama Administration has also widened the scope of authorized drone attacks in Afghanistan. An August report by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee disclosed that the Joint Integrated Prioritized Target List—the Pentagon's roster of approved terrorist targets, containing three hundred and sixty-seven



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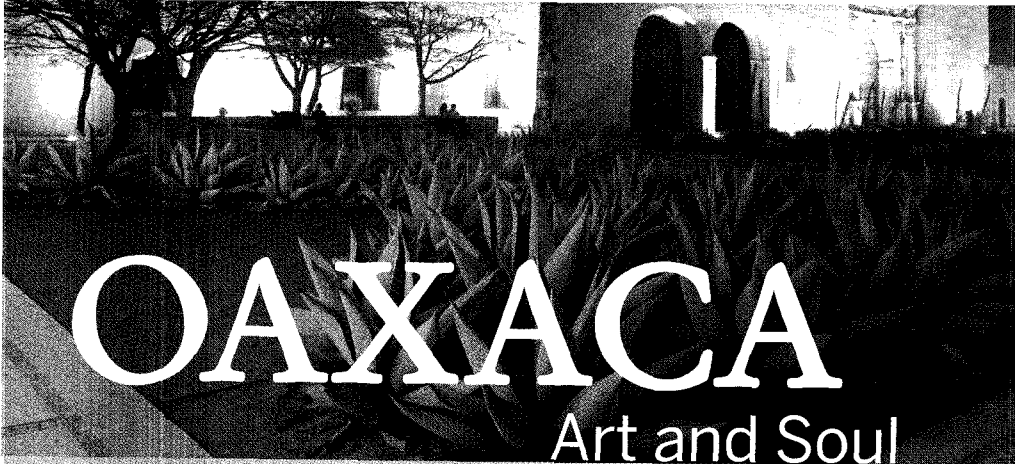
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OAXACA

Art and Soul

VISITORS TO OAXACA QUICKLY DISCOVER that everything old is indeed new again. The area's Zapotec and Mixtec people have long been known throughout Mexico for their folk-art traditions, crafts, and cuisine – traceable to the settlement of Monte Albán. Today the legacy fills the graceful colonial plazas and courtyards of Oaxaca City with renewed vitality.

A stroll along **Calle Alcalá**, just off the Zócalo, telescopes the heritage. The **Museo de las Culturas de Oaxaca** presents a time line of indigenous crafts. Fourteenth-century Mixtec gold and gemstone jewelry unearthed at Monte Albán is a showstopper in the collection. Next door, in the **Iglesia de Santo Domingo**, similar skills, including carving, painting, and metalwork, were employed in the sixteenth century to cover every inch of the church's magnificent interior.

Along both sides of the street, historic mansions have been converted into museums and galleries, including the **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Oaxaca** and the **Instituto de Artes Gráficas de Oaxaca**, a warren of print and photo exhibitions, workshops, and a library. The lines between art and traditional craft are often blurred, as in the naturally dyed hand-woven rugs sold at **La Mano Mágica** and the textiles at **Los Baules**. Gastronomes say the same is true of Chef Alejandro

Ruiz's regional fare at **Casa Oaxaca**, nearby the Santo Domingo church.

The city's large daily food and craft markets are tasters' and shoppers' links to villages in the surrounding fertile valleys. Many are known for the particular skills of their artisans, such as **Teotitlán del Valle** for rug weaving. Six miles away, the must-see destination of **Monte Albán**, which shares a World Heritage Site designation with Oaxaca City, was the ancient Zapotec capital, later occupied by Mixtecs. From the pinnacle of its ruins, it still offers a breathtaking vista of mountains and valleys.

Across the Sierra Madre del Sur, lies the state of Oaxaca's Pacific coast, an idyllic stretch of fishing villages and, around the Bahías de Huatulco, indulgent resorts. The beaches are a long, scenic drive or a short flight away from the city. When you reach them you'll find the excitement that lies in catching the next wave at **Puerto Escondido's International Surf Competition**, November 6–8, or savoring the best of the old in Huatulco's Pre-Hispanic Cuisine Contest, part of the **Film & Food Festival**, November 19–21.

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World Heritage Site, Oaxaca, is a compact city with the finest baroque church in Mexico. From its elaborate Santo Domingo and iconic Monte Albán to the varied markets, crafts and festivities, cosmopolitan Oaxaca is a kaleidoscopic flourish of cultural riches.



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names—was recently expanded to include some fifty Afghan drug lords who are suspected of giving money to help finance the Taliban. These new targets are a step removed from Al Qaeda. According to the Senate report, “There is no evidence that any significant amount of the drug proceeds goes to Al Qaeda.” The inclusion of Afghan narcotics traffickers on the U.S. target list could prove awkward, some observers say, given that President Hamid Karzai’s running mate, Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim, and the President’s brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, are strongly suspected of involvement in narcotics. Andrew Bacevich, a professor of history and international relations at Boston University, who has written extensively on military matters, said, “Are they going to target Karzai’s brother?” He went on, “We should be very careful about who we define as the enemy we have to kill. Leaders of Al Qaeda, of course. But you can’t kill people on Tuesday and negotiate with them on Wednesday.”

Defining who is and who is not too tangential for the U.S. to kill can be difficult. John Radsan, a former lawyer in the C.I.A.’s office of general counsel, who is now a professor at William Mitchell College of Law, in St. Paul, Minnesota, says, “You can’t target someone just because he visited an Al Qaeda Web site. But you also don’t want to wait until they’re about to detonate a bomb. It’s a sliding scale.” Equally fraught is the question of how many civilian deaths can be justified. “If it’s Osama bin Laden in a house with a four-year-old, most people will say go ahead,” Radsan says. “But if it’s three or four children? Some say that’s too many. And if he’s in a school? Many say don’t do it.” Such judgment calls are being made daily by the C.I.A., which, Radsan points out, “doesn’t have much experience with killing. Traditionally, the agency that does that is the Department of Defense.”

Though the C.I.A.’s methodology remains unknown, the Pentagon has created elaborate formulas to help the military make such lethal calculations. A top military expert, who declined to be named, spoke of the military’s system, saying, “There’s a whole taxonomy of targets.” Some people are approved for killing on sight. For others, additional permission is needed. A target’s location enters the equation, too. If a school, hospital, or mosque is within the likely blast



“The dealer will allow me to return the limo if my investments go bad.”

radius of a missile, that, too, is weighed by a computer algorithm before a lethal strike is authorized. According to the recent Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, the U.S. military places no name on its targeting list until there are “two verifiable human sources” and “substantial additional evidence” that the person is an enemy.

In Israel, which conducts unmanned air strikes in the Palestinian territories, the process of identifying targets, in theory at least, is even more exacting. Military lawyers have to be convinced that the target can’t reasonably be captured, and that he poses a threat to national security. Military specialists in Arab culture also have to be convinced that the hit will do more good than harm. “You have to be incredibly cautious,” Amos Guiora, a law professor at the University of Utah, says. From 1994 to 1997, he advised Israeli commanders on targeted killings in the Gaza Strip. “Not everyone is at the level appropriate for targeted killing,” he says. “You want a leader, the hub with many spokes.” Guiora, who follows the Predator program closely, fears that national-security officials here lack a clear policy and a firm definition of success. “Once you start targeted killing, you better make

damn sure there’s a policy guiding it,” he says. “It can’t be just catch-as-catch-can.”

Daniel Byman, the director of Georgetown University’s Center for Peace and Security Studies, argues that, when possible, “it’s almost always better to arrest terrorists than to kill them. You get intelligence then. Dead men tell no tales.” The C.I.A.’s killing of Saad bin Laden, Osama’s son, provides a case in point. By the time that Saad bin Laden had reached Pakistan’s tribal areas, late last year, there was little chance that any law-enforcement authority could capture him alive. But, according to Hillary Mann Leverett, an adviser to the National Security Council between 2001 and 2003, the Bush Administration would have had several opportunities to interrogate Saad bin Laden earlier, if it had been willing to make a deal with Iran, where, according to U.S. intelligence, he lived occasionally after September 11th. “The Iranians offered to work out an international framework for transferring terror suspects, but the Bush Administration refused,” she said. In December, 2008, Saad bin Laden left Iran for Pakistan; within months, according to NPR, a Predator missile had ended his life. “We absolutely did not get the most we could,” Leverett said. “Saad bin Laden

would have been very, very valuable in terms of what he knew. He probably would have been a gold mine."

Byman is working on a book about Israel's experiences with counterterrorism, including targeted killing. Though the strikes there have weakened the Palestinian leadership, he said, "if you use these tools wrong, you can lose the moral high ground, which is going to hurt you. Inevitably, some of the intelligence is going to be wrong, so you're always rolling the dice. That's the reality of real-time intelligence."

Indeed, the history of targeted killing is marked by errors. In 1973, for example, Israeli intelligence agents murdered a Moroccan waiter by mistake. They thought that he was a terrorist who had been involved in slaughtering Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, a year earlier. And in 1986 the Reagan Administration attempted to retaliate against the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi for his suspected role in the deadly bombing of a disco frequented by American servicemen in Germany. The U.S. launched an air strike on Qaddafi's household. The bombs missed him, but they did kill his fifteen-month-old daughter.

The C.I.A.'s early attempts at targeting Osama bin Laden were also problematic. After Al Qaeda blew up the U.S. Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, in August, 1998, President Bill Clinton retaliated, by launching seventy-five Tomahawk cruise missiles at a site in Afghanistan where bin Laden was expected to attend a summit meeting. According to reports, the bombardment killed some twenty Pakistani militants but missed bin Laden, who had left the scene hours earlier.

The development of the Predator, in the early nineteen-nineties, was supposed to help eliminate such mistakes. The drones can hover above a target for up to forty hours before refuelling, and the precise video footage makes it much easier to identify targets. But the strikes are only as accurate as the intelligence that goes into them. Tips from informants on the ground are subject to error, as is the interpretation of video images. Not long before September 11, 2001, for instance, several U.S. counterterrorism officials became certain that a drone had captured footage of bin Laden in a locale he was known to frequent in Afghanistan. The video showed a tall man in robes, surrounded by armed bodyguards in a dia-

mond formation. At that point, drones were unarmed, and were used only for surveillance. "The optics were not great, but it was him," Henry Crumpton, then the C.I.A.'s top covert-operations officer for the region, told *Time*. But two other former C.I.A. officers, who also saw the footage, have doubts. "It's like an urban legend," one of them told me. "They just jumped to conclusions. You couldn't see his face. It could have been Joe Schmo. Believe me, no tall man with a beard is safe anywhere in Southwest Asia." In February, 2002, along the mountainous eastern border of Afghanistan, a Predator reportedly followed and killed three suspicious Afghans, including a tall man in robes who was thought to be bin Laden. The victims turned out to be innocent villagers, gathering scrap metal.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the local informants, who also serve as confirming witnesses for the air strikes, are notoriously unreliable. A former C.I.A. officer who was based in Afghanistan after September 11th told me that an Afghan source had once sworn to him that one of Al Qaeda's top leaders was being treated in a nearby clinic. The former officer said that he could barely hold off an air strike after he passed on the tip to his superiors. "They scrambled together an elite team," he recalled. "We caught hell from headquarters. They said 'Why aren't you moving on it?' when we insisted on checking it out first." It turned out to be an intentionally false lead. "Sometimes you're dealing with tribal chiefs," the former officer said. "Often, they say an enemy of theirs is Al Qaeda because they just want to get rid of somebody. Or they made crap up because they wanted to prove they were valuable, so that they could make money. You couldn't take their word."

The consequences of bad ground intelligence can be tragic. In September, a NATO air strike in Afghanistan killed between seventy and a hundred and twenty-five people, many of them civilians, who were taking fuel from two stranded oil trucks; they had been mistaken for Taliban insurgents. (The incident is being investigated by NATO.) According to a reporter for the *Guardian*, the bomb strike, by an F-15E fighter plane, left such a tangle of body parts that village elders resorted to handing out pieces of unidentifiable corpses to the grieving families, so that they could have some-



"Diagnosis cookie?"

thing to bury. One Afghan villager told the newspaper, "I took a piece of flesh with me home and I called it my son."

Predator drones, with their superior surveillance abilities, have a better track record for accuracy than fighter jets, according to intelligence officials. Also, the drone's smaller Hellfire missiles are said to cause far less collateral damage. Still, the recent campaign to kill Baitullah Mehsud offers a sobering case study of the hazards of robotic warfare. It appears to have taken sixteen missile strikes, and fourteen months, before the C.I.A. succeeded in killing him. During this hunt, between two hundred and seven and three hundred and twenty-one additional people were killed, depending on which news accounts you rely upon. It's all but impossible to get a complete picture of whom the C.I.A. killed during this campaign, which took place largely in Waziristan. Not only has the Pakistani government closed off the region to the outside press; it has also shut out international humanitarian organizations like the International Committee for the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders. "We can't get within a hundred kilometres of Waziristan," Brice de la Vingne, the operational coordinator for Doctors Without Borders in Pakistan, told me. "We tried to set up an emergency room, but the authorities wouldn't give us authorization."

A few Pakistani and international news stories, most of which rely on secondhand sources rather than on eyewitness accounts, offer the basic details. On June 14, 2008, a C.I.A. drone strike on Mehsud's home town, Makeen, killed an unidentified person. On January 2, 2009, four more unidentified people were killed. On February 14th, more than thirty people were killed, twenty-five of whom were apparently members of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, though none were identified as major leaders. On April 1st, a drone attack on Mehsud's deputy, Hakimullah Mehsud, killed ten to twelve of his followers instead. On April 29th, missiles fired from drones killed between six and ten more people, one of whom was believed to be an Al Qaeda leader. On May 9th, five to ten more unidentified people were killed; on May 12th, as many as eight people died. On June 14th, three to eight more people were killed by drone attacks. On June 23rd, the C.I.A. report-

edly killed between two and six unidentified militants outside Makeen, and then killed dozens more people—possibly as many as eighty-six—during funeral prayers for the earlier casualties. An account in the Pakistani publication *The News* described ten of the dead as children. Four were identified as elderly tribal leaders. One eyewitness, who lost his right leg during the bombing, told Agence France-Presse that the mourners suspected what was coming: "After the prayers ended, people were asking each other to leave the area, as drones were hovering." The drones, which make a buzzing noise, are nicknamed *machay* ("wasps") by the Pashtun natives, and can sometimes be seen and heard, depending on weather conditions. Before the mourners could clear out, the eyewitness said, two drones started firing into the crowd. "It created havoc," he said. "There was smoke and dust everywhere. Injured people were crying and asking for help." Then a third missile hit. "I fell to the ground," he said.

The local population was clearly angered by the Pakistani government for allowing the U.S. to target a funeral. (Intelligence had suggested that Mehsud would be among the mourners.) An editorial in *The News* denounced the strike as sinking to the level of the terrorists. The Urdu newspaper *Jang* declared that Obama was "shutting his ears to the screams of thousands of women whom your drones have turned into dust." U.S. officials were undeterred, continuing drone strikes in the region until Mehsud was killed.

After such attacks, the Taliban, attempting to stir up anti-American sentiment in the region, routinely claims, falsely, that the victims are all innocent civilians. In several Pakistani cities, large protests have been held to decry the drone program. And, in the past year, perpetrators of terrorist bombings in Pakistan have begun presenting their acts as "revenge for the drone attacks." In recent weeks, a rash of bloody assaults on Pakistani government strongholds has raised the spectre that formerly unaligned militant groups have joined together against the Zardari Administration.

David Kilcullen, a counter-insurgency warfare expert who has advised General David Petraeus in Iraq, has said that the propaganda costs of drone attacks have been disastrously high. Militants have used the drone strikes to denounce the

Zardari government—a shaky and unpopular regime—as little more than an American puppet. A study that Kilcullen co-wrote for the Center for New American Security, a think tank, argues, "Every one of these dead non-combatants represents an alienated family, a new revenge feud, and more recruits for a militant movement that has grown exponentially even as drone strikes have increased." His co-writer, Andrew Exum, a former Army Ranger who has advised General Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan, told me, "Neither Kilcullen nor I is a fundamentalist—we're not saying drones are not part of the strategy. But we are saying that right now they are part of the problem. If we use tactics that are killing people's brothers and sons, not to mention their sisters and wives, we can work at cross-purposes with insuring that the tribal population doesn't side with the militants. Using the Predator is a tactic, not a strategy."

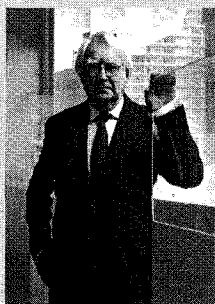
Exum says that he's worried by the remote-control nature of Predator warfare. "As a military person, I put myself in the shoes of someone in FATA"—Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas—"and there's something about pilotless drones that doesn't strike me as an honorable way of warfare," he said. "As a classics major, I have a classical sense of what it means to be a warrior." An Iraq combat veteran who helped design much of the military's doctrine for using unmanned drones also has qualms. He said, "There's something important about putting your own sons and daughters at risk when you choose to wage war as a nation. We risk losing that flesh-and-blood investment if we go too far down this road."

Bruce Riedel, who has been deeply involved in these debates during the past few years, sees the choices facing Obama as exceedingly hard. "Is the drone program helping or hurting?" he asked. "It's a tough question. These are not cost-free operations." He likened the drone attacks to "going after a beehive, one bee at a time." The problem is that, inevitably, "the hive will always produce more bees." But, he said, "the only pressure currently being put on Pakistan and Afghanistan is the drones." He added, "It's really all we've got to disrupt Al Qaeda. The reason the Administration continues to use it is obvious: it doesn't really have anything else." ♦

on the town

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE INFERNO

After the deadliest fires it has ever known, a nation reassesses.

BY CHRISTINE KENNEALLY

Earlier this year, on the day now known as Black Saturday, when the worst wildfires in modern Australian history incinerated more than a million acres of the state of Victoria and killed a hundred and seventy-three people, Bruce Ackerman left his house in Marysville to meet up with his regular Saturday lunch group. Marysville, a small town some sixty miles northeast of Melbourne, sprang up in the eighteenth century as a stopover for miners on their way to the gold-rush towns farther north. Situated in a cool valley of the Great Dividing Range, the mountainous spine that dominates eastern Australia, the town is a popular tourist destination. Ackerman, a bluff fifty-year-old, is proud of being a fourth-generation inhabitant, and told me that his work as a plumber had taken him inside every house there except one. Over the years, he had served on the water board, the cemetery trust, the school council, the ambulance service, and the volunteer fire brigade.

The lunch group broke up earlier than usual; three of Ackerman's friends, a fire captain and two members of his team, were about to be placed on standby because of the risk of bushfire. Two days earlier, Victoria's state premier, John Brumby, had held a press conference at which he stated that the coming Saturday, near the end of the antipodean summer, would be the "worst day in the history of the state." "The state is just tinder-dry," he said, and told Victorians that it was time to put their fire plan into action.

After lunch, Ackerman drove some seven miles southwest to the small town of Narbethong and had a drink with some friends. While he was there, he became aware of an unusual amount of activity on the road running through the town. Drivers sped through, asking if Narbethong was safe from fire. Amid the gathering panic, Ackerman smelled

smoke. He rushed back north to Marysville against a stream of traffic coming the other way. By the time he was a few miles from Marysville, he could see a colossal firewall coming toward him from the southwest. It was three hundred feet high. He raced it all the way back to the town, driving on the wrong side of the road to get through blocked intersections and dodging cars that sped toward him in their effort to flee. The fire behind Ackerman emitted a roar like a jet engine and threw embers and fireballs out ahead of him. Huge patches of trees and grass ignited around the car as he drove. In his mind Ackerman started running through the steps of his fire plan.

Fire plans are a distinctive feature of Australian life. Whereas other regions prone to wildfire, most notably California, typically employ mandatory evacuations to remove citizens from an affected area, Australians are instructed to pick one of two options: leave early or stay and fight the fire. Though risky, the choice to stay is a popular one, both because unprotected houses are often lost to the flames and because of a streak of self-reliance in the Australian character. Australians have had great success saving their homes: a fire front passes in a matter of minutes, during which time the house shields those inside from the heat, and research has shown that houses usually catch fire not as the front passes but, rather, before or after, when wind-borne embers settle on it. Fire plans include removing flammable items from around the house, storing as much water as possible, and being ready to put out flames as a fire front draws near. Many Australians become experts on matters like smoke inhalation and the effects of radiant heat on the body, and public-information ads drive home the importance of wearing long sleeves and trousers and avoiding all synthetic materials, which ignite much faster in radiant heat. The best-

prepared people build their houses out of fireproof materials, install sprinkler systems on their roofs, and maintain water tanks attached to professional-grade firefighting pumps and hoses.

At the start of this year, a California study, pointing to a dramatic increase in the number of buildings lost to wildfire in recent decades, recommended the

seventy-one people died. The Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 killed seventy-five people and destroyed more than two thousand homes. In the past ten years, the risk of catastrophic fire has increased, because of a pervasive drought, the severest since records began, which is widely thought to be a result of global warming. Victorians are asked to use

would be thirty-seven degrees Celsius—ninety-eight degrees Fahrenheit—but Yeo told a fire chief that a temperature upward of a hundred and thirteen degrees Fahrenheit was more likely. “I think we are going to break records,” she said. By Wednesday, the numbers she was calculating on a system that rates the danger of fire were worse than



Bushfire burning in Victoria. The energy of all the fires on Black Saturday was the equivalent of fifteen hundred Hiroshimas.

adoption of “more effective” Australian tactics representing “a more sustainable coexistence with fire.” But in the months since Black Saturday the Australian approach to fighting fire has come under question. During an ongoing royal commission, experts have pondered how wildfires should be handled, on an increasingly fire-prone continent, and also the extent to which the deaths of Black Saturday were the result not just of the Australian landscape but of an entire mentality.

ANDREW BROWN/BILL/EPA/CORBIS
Australia’s worst fires have all occurred in its southeastern states, with Victoria often hit the hardest. In the Black Friday fires of 1939, almost a quarter of the state was burned, and

less than a hundred and fifty-five litres of water per person per day. Gardens can be watered for only a few hours on two days a week, and it is illegal to use a hose when washing your car.

This year, starting on January 28th, Victoria experienced the most severe heat wave in its history. Many elderly people died; steel train tracks buckled; in one Melbourne park a thousand fruit bats fell dead from the trees. By Monday, February 2nd, Claire Yeo, one of Victoria’s two fire meteorologists, noted that all the factors that create extreme fire weather were evident: high temperatures; strong, gusty winds; and very little moisture. On Tuesday, the Bureau of Meteorology predicted that the temperature for Saturday the seventh

anything she had ever seen. So terrible was the forecast that, when she had to brief assembled fire chiefs, meteorologists, and other specialists on the situation, she stood at her lectern for some time, hanging her head and unable to speak.

Yeo’s predictions were accurate. Saturday the seventh was the hottest day in Melbourne since records began to be kept, in 1855. The temperature reached 46.4 degrees Celsius (115.5 degrees Fahrenheit) in Melbourne and a hundred and twenty degrees Fahrenheit elsewhere in the state. Humidity was at just six per cent, and a strong wind was blowing from the northwest. The six hundred fires that started that day were not just the dead-

on the town

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liest that Australia had ever known but among the worst the world had seen for decades.

At around 3 P.M., a watcher in a fire tower at Mount Despair reported a smoke plume in the Murrindindi state forest, a little more than twenty miles northwest of Marysville. From there, burning embers were carried by the wind to Little Wonder, a point at the top of a ridge in the nearby Black Ranges, and soon there was fire on the other side of the ridge, too. The fire was by now travelling at around seven miles an hour. With the northwesterly wind behind it, it spread southeast toward a popular camping spot. A fire crew raced to get to the campsite before the fire did. The firefighters drove two trucks into a nearby river and gathered nineteen campers into the water. Minutes later, the fire caught up with them. Nine children and an adult were crammed into the cabs, and the other campers sheltered beside the trucks, under wet blankets, while the firemen fought the flames. The campsite was incinerated, but everyone survived.

A little later, a front of cooler weather moved into Victoria. Temperatures dropped eighteen degrees Fahrenheit, and all over Melbourne people spilled from their houses in relief. But, while a drop in temperature can make a fire less likely, it doesn't have much impact on one that is already raging. Worse, the cool front brought about a ninety-degree change in the wind, from northwesterly to southwesterly. Now the long, narrow line of fire that had been spreading southeast became a wide fire front that charged northeast to a string of towns along the Maroon-dah Highway: first Narbethong, then Marysville, Buxton, Taggerty, and Alexandra.

The fire hit Marysville so fast that no one had good information about what was happening. Not long before, it had seemed that the fire would pass the town by. Ian Bates, who was on duty at the State Emergency Services building, recalls standing in front of the building talking to the local fire captain. He glanced over the captain's shoulder and saw the fire com-

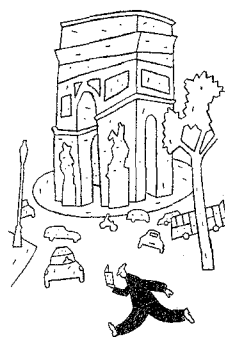
ing at the town. He pointed and said, "Look at that!" At the same moment, the captain pointed over Bates's shoulder and shouted exactly the same thing. Bates looked behind him. The fire was coming at the town from both sides.

Residents, seeing huge clouds of dirty orange-yellow smoke looming over the trees, got in their cars and drove, either to shelter in the local football oval or out of town entirely. The local police, firefighters, and emergency workers scrambled to alert people to the danger. Bates and his deputy drove through residential streets with their lights and sirens on, knocking on doors and yelling through the P.A. system that everyone needed to leave.

They put together a convoy that was able to exit the town in less than thirty minutes.

Once Bruce Ackerman got home, he called his daughter and his son's girlfriend, both in their twenties and living in Marysville, and told them to leave town. (His son works as a fireman, and his wife was in Melbourne with friends for the night.) Then he phoned an elderly couple next door and told them to go to the football oval, but they were reluctant to leave. The wife walked over to Ackerman's house. "She was shaking like a dog," he told me. "She said, 'I'm not scared. I've stood up to bigger men than that bloody bit of smoke.' And I said, 'Elsa! Get down to the oval.' " A little later, her husband came over. "We went through the same routine," Ackerman said. "He said, 'I'm tough and I'm not going for no one.' And I took him outside and I made him listen to the roar, and I said, 'Dudley! Piss off!' And he did." Ackerman phoned his next-door neighbors on the other side, Liz Fiske and her thirteen-year-old son. Fiske's husband, a fire captain who was away on duty, had been best man at Ackerman's wedding, and Ackerman had been best man at his. Fiske, too, refused to leave her house.

Between phone calls, Ackerman frantically prepared his home. He took his truck out of the shed at the foot of his front yard and parked it in a carport next to the house. He removed all the



doormats from the house, stuffed draft-blockers under the doors, checked that all the windows were shut, and started the sprinklers on his lawn. He grabbed a ladder and checked that the gutters on his house were clear. The light outside became dimmer and dimmer as the sun was blocked out by an enormous pall of smoke. Ackerman filled eight buckets, two watering cans, the dog's bath, the spa bath, the wheelbarrow, and the trash can with water, the house's water pressure falling all the while. He moved out everything that was stored under his veranda, took down the picnic umbrellas in the garden, and removed the gas tank from the barbecue. He turned off the gas to the house. Then the house's electricity failed, everything went dark, and the water supply petered out. Ackerman called Liz Fiske again, hoping that there might still be time for her and her son to leave. This time, her son answered the phone. He told Ackerman that his mother was in the yard, fighting the fire. Ackerman said to him, "Be brave for your mum. You'll be all right, mate. You're a strong man."

At around half past six, the fire front hit Ackerman's house. The fire shone as brightly as daylight, illuminating everything—"red, just red, pure bright light, red raw," Ackerman said. As the fire burned around his house, Ackerman was in constant motion. "I was upstairs, downstairs, in and out of every room, back and forth, to and fro, looking where the fire was spotting, popping in and out with buckets, dousing it down. The fire came right up to the house, and it was catching," he told me.

The front passed in minutes, but to Ackerman it seemed like days. "I was a volunteer fireman in Ash Wednesday. I've seen a lot, but I've never, ever seen anything like this," he told me. All night, Marysville was lit by a dull, smoky glow as its buildings burned down. Explosions and flares went off constantly as gas tanks, paint cans, and other flammable objects ignited. Just after the front went through, Ackerman was outside again to put out spot fires that had started around his house. Liz Fiske's house was on fire, and he couldn't find her or her son. "I hoped to Christ they had got out," he said. He drove down to the football oval, where his elderly neighbors had taken refuge, along with fifty or

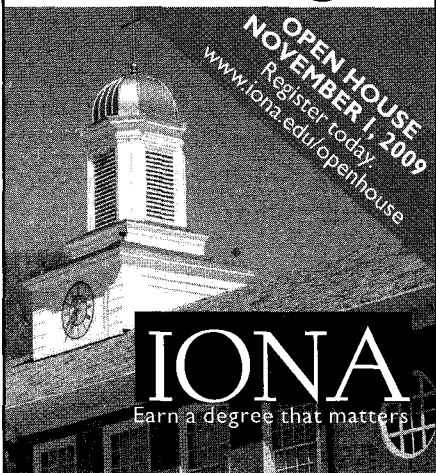
so other residents who had missed the convoy out of town. Everyone there was alive, and the grass on the oval had stayed green, even though all the trees that circled it had burned. Then he drove back through the town to check on friends whose house had begun to burn. By the time he got there, the piping to their water pump had melted, their tanks were leaking, and the pump itself had vaporized. They were trying their hardest, Ackerman said, but they were absolutely exhausted. Ackerman put on gloves and pulled a flaming trellis off a wall, saving their house. He went back to Liz Fiske's house, which had burned down completely, and then drove three miles to check on an uncle and aunt: their house was destroyed, too, but, as there was no sign of their car, he felt confident that they had managed to leave. Around half past three in the morning, Ackerman ran into a firefighter who had a satellite phone, and he called his wife to tell her he was alive.

Six days after Black Saturday, I drove to the town of Alexandra, twenty miles north of Marysville, to meet Geoff McClure, of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and to see the fire, which had now joined up with another large fire and was heading toward Alexandra. McClure was affable and solicitous, but he looked tired. Over the week, the fire had burned through almost three hundred thousand acres, and he had been working fourteen hours a day. He lent me some flame-retardant overalls and a helmet made from plastic with a melting point above three hundred and twenty degrees. Then we drove out toward the fire line.

As we left Alexandra, we saw the Great Dividing Range framed by a mass of smoke that looked like a giant cumulus cloud. The fire was heading downhill in a fire line about twenty-five miles across. Because the wind that day was blowing back against the fire, the smoke spiralled up from within the burning vegetation. The darker the plume and the fuzzier its boundaries, McClure explained, the more intense the fire.

Some eucalyptus, of which Australia has more than seven hundred species, produces significantly more radiant heat when burning than the wood of other

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trees, and the growth of eucalyptus forests is naturally punctuated by fires. Fire promotes rejuvenation, by removing the buildup of ground litter, opening the canopy, and eliminating competitive species. It is also a crucible in which the buds of many eucalyptus species sprout. Currently, Victoria's Department of Sustainability and Environment is responsible for controlled burning to reduce fuel loads. This doesn't prevent fires, but it does decrease the intensity of the fires that occur.

We passed a police roadblock, and drove up a tree-lined dirt track in the direction of the fire. The goal, McClure explained, was to stop the fire from coming out of the forest; there was little anyone could do to stop its descent down the hill. Hundreds of firefighters were being deployed; in recent days, they had used bulldozers to establish containment lines of bare earth that could interrupt the progress of the fire. In the bush, the bulldozer

is as essential to firefighting as the fire truck. The containment lines, only ten feet wide, looked precarious, but although embers carried on the wind can sometimes enable fire to jump a line, the absence of fuel at the line prevents the fire from burning through. We drove to where two young firefighters were strengthening a containment line by back burning—starting a controlled fire that would burn back toward an approaching fire front, depriving it of fuel. Using fuel cannisters with long nozzles, they had established a line of flames some two feet high and intensely hot. My eyes stung as we stood watching, fifteen feet away.

Strange cataclysmic phenomena occur in a huge wildfire. Kevin Tollhurst, a fire ecologist in Melbourne, told me that fires as hot as the one at Marysville—which is thought to have reached a temperature of twenty-two hundred degrees—can produce their own weather.

Fires generate convection columns of gas, which may rise as much as forty thousand feet and form pyrocumulus clouds. The clouds can create lightning, which may then start more fires downwind of the original fire. The sound of the gas—like a twig popping in a fireplace, but exponentially louder—creates a wildfire's distinctive roar. The Marysville fire was so hot that gas flared out laterally, acting as a wick, along which the fire caught quickly, crossing the ground in sudden, unpredictable pulses. In the face of such a fire, it is possible to be looking at a front more than a thousand feet away and then, in an instant, to be surrounded by flames. Firefighters described the Black Saturday firestorm as "alive," and said that its behavior was completely unprecedented. In some areas it was apparently cyclonic, coming at them from all sides, burning up a road in one direction and then, minutes later, burning in the opposite direction. Tollhurst told the royal commission that the energy from all the fires that day was the equivalent of fifteen hundred Hiroshimas.

Later, McClure took me to see some of the damage to a cluster of properties just off the road south of Alexandra. The buildings looked as if they had imploded. Glass that had melted like toffee was draped around their edges. In the yard next to the remains of one building, the blackened branches of a tree stretched out and up, and from them dangled pitch-black round baubles. I picked one up from the ground and pushed my thumb through the charcoal outer layer to the yellow core, which was leathery and desiccated. It still smelled faintly of apple.

The devastation of Black Saturday became clear only over many days, unfolding for survivors as a disorienting nightmare. Devastation extended across Victoria. In places where the fire had passed, the countryside was completely silent, with no sign of animal life. In Marysville, Bruce Ackerman's house was one of only fourteen left standing. The town had been annihilated in an afternoon. Police set up roadblocks around the worst affected places, and three towns, including Marysville, were declared crime scenes, after arson, a surprisingly common cause of wildfires, was



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suspected. No one was allowed back into Marysville for weeks.

The death toll rose from fifteen to a hundred and seventy-three. It was clear that some bodies would never be recovered, having been effectively cremated. Others were found unburned in positions that suggested that they had simply dropped dead while running from the flame; the radiant heat of a bushfire, which can ignite mattresses and curtains through closed windows, can kill at a considerable distance more or less instantaneously. Survivors emerged with ever more excruciating stories. As people escaped, they had seen their neighbors' bodies lying charred in the streets. A few days after the fire, police found a house with the remains of nine bodies: eight adults had formed a protective huddle around a baby.

Nearly two weeks after Black Saturday, I drove from Alexandra to the Marysville golf course, just outside the town, to meet with Bruce Ackerman, who, because his house was intact, had been allowed to stay in Marysville, alongside the Army, the police, and emergency-services crews. As I waited in the parking lot, I walked over to a semi-trailer that looked as if it had been detonated from within. The exhaust stacks drooped outward, and

thick rivulets of melted aluminum lay congealed in the gutter beneath. When I tapped one with my foot, it clanged loudly. Ackerman arrived, and we sat on the porch of the clubhouse. In front of us, many trees were burned, but the links were still green. A tiny bird with a long tail and a glowing blue face hopped about on the grass.

For eight days after the fire, Ackerman told me, he had helped the police as they searched for bodies in collapsed houses. During a fire, he explained, people usually take shelter in the bathroom: "And who would know where the bathroom is? The plumber." Thirty-nine people in Marysville lost their lives; Ackerman's neighbors Liz Fiske and her son were among the dead.

Not until six weeks after Black Saturday was Marysville reopened for residents, and a few days later Ackerman took me on a tour of the town, which was still closed to the public. Wire fencing had been erected along most streets, cordoning off the destroyed buildings. We drove along the river to a waterfall, which, like many things in Marysville, had once been invisible through thick foliage but could now be seen from hundreds of yards away. We stopped at Ackerman's house, a large, rustic two-

story home, incongruously intact and attractive amid the devastation. Trees that must have been fully alight stood no more than twenty feet from the house. Ackerman's front yard was green and inviting, but a big tin shed at the foot of the lawn was splayed everywhere, as if another tin shed had been dropped on it from a great height. Farther down the hill, the Army had created a car yard, neatly lining up nearly a hundred skeletal cars and buses.

While we drove around the town, Ackerman's phone rang constantly. It sometimes seemed that there was little in the town that he wasn't doing. He had helped reinstate water service, refilling the depleted reservoir. He was head of a committee to establish a temporary village nearby to house residents who were rebuilding their homes. That morning, he had dug a grave.

Nine days after Black Saturday, Victoria set up a yearlong commission to investigate the cause of the fires and "all aspects of the government's bushfire strategy." The commission delivered an interim report in August, in time to influence preparations for the coming fire season, which begins next week. The public hearings, streamed live over the Internet, have been avidly followed, and the sense that many Victorians had that they can manage the risks of fire has started to seem dangerously close to complacency.

The commission asked people how they had heard about and tracked the fire. Had they used mobile phones or land lines? Were they listening to the radio or watching the TV? Did they text their neighbors, or check official Web sites, or dial 000 (the Australian equivalent of 911)? Despite a bristling network of communications technology across the state, when the fire came many people found themselves completely alone. Witnesses described emergency calls that were never answered, and one that was answered by an operator a thousand miles away in Queensland, who had no idea that there even were bushfires in Victoria. Communication failures also occurred between agencies and up and down lines of command. Fire crews repeatedly called for backup that never came. A radio station of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation became a kind of emergency infor-

mation service, but a number of its broadcasts were based on official reports that were inaccurate or obsolete by crucial minutes, or even hours. People checked their televisions and radios for news of a fire that they—and in many cases *only* they—could see coming toward them.

Victoria's administration is now grappling with new ways of alerting its citizens to large-scale danger. One expert has suggested making fire information available in real time via Twitter. Australia has one of the highest cell-phone-user populations in the world, and, in early March, I (along with millions of other cell-phone users in Victoria) received a text message from the Victorian police, warning of extreme fire weather over the next two days. But other government-level inefficiencies remain. For instance, the Department of Sustainability and Environment is supposed to conduct controlled fires to lower fuel loads in dense forests, but some witnesses described the incineration of streets that had seen no controlled burning for more than forty years. Residents complained that local councils required them to get permits before uprooting native plants, even trees overhanging their houses, despite fire guidelines which state that all houses in fire-prone areas need large cleared areas around them. (New laws allow Victorians to clear any plants within ten metres of their houses.)

Throughout the commission's earliest hearings, one issue dominated: the "stay or go" policy. Culturally, this is a sensitive issue; protecting a home against fire has been an aspect of Australian life in the bush for a hundred and fifty years. But over weeks of testimony it became apparent that many residents treat "stay or go" more like "wait and see," either because they are complacent or because they panic once they hear the fire's roar and see the sky go dark. Leaving at the last minute is the worst possible strategy. By the time you can see the firewall, your exits may be blocked, and by fleeing you forfeit the heat shield of your home. Often, bodies are found between house and car, keys waiting in the ignition. Before Black Saturday, a study of deaths in a hundred years of Australian fires showed that the majority occurred during late evacuation. The experts behind this study told the commission that they

still believed in "stay or go"—that, as one slogan has it, "houses protect people, and people protect houses." But police testimony given at the royal commission indicated a worrying reversal of the usual trend: of the hundred and seventy-three deaths, a hundred and thirteen occurred *inside* houses. No evidence has yet been released to indicate whether these people were actively defending their homes or passively sheltering from the fire. If the latter, the option of staying and fighting remains at least theoretically viable. But, if investigation reveals that many people died while still fighting the fire, Black Saturday's most significant legacy may be to have exposed a fundamental limitation of the "stay or go" policy. In California, officials currently preparing for the height of fire season have backed away from their consideration of "stay and go," and unanimously advocated evacuation. Even in Australia, "stay or go" now finds fewer supporters: recently, a new scale for rating fire danger was announced, and, at the highest rating—"code red (catastrophic)"—people are told that the safest option is simply to leave.

According to some experts, even if all systems had worked perfectly on Black Saturday, many houses might have been undefendable. The fire ecologist Kevin Tollhurst, giving evidence before the commission, said that Australian fire science tends to be based on observation of smaller fires, but that it seems increasingly likely that fire behavior is partly a function of scale. Many experts predict that global warming—an issue that the commission will formally examine—will make fires on the scale of Black Saturday's more and more common. If that turns out to be the case, it may be that models for understanding a fire as large as the one that destroyed Marysville don't yet exist.

On my last day with Ackerman, as he left me in the clubhouse of the golf course, I asked him whether his own experience defending his home had changed his opinion about the feasibility of staying to fight a fire. He turned to me. "Should I stay or should I go?" he said, and held up a finger. "Go! Believe me, next time I'll be the first one out." ♦

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Video from the Australian wildfires.

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Cameron on a studio lot in Los Angeles, in the armored suit wo



“licated stuff anyone’s ever done.” Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

The director James Cameron is six feet two and fair, with paper-white hair and turbid blue-green eyes. He is a screamer—righteous, withering, aggrieved. “Do you want Paul Verhoeven to finish this motherfucker?” he shouted, an inch from Arnold Schwarzenegger’s face, after the actor went AWOL from the set of “True Lies,” a James Bond spoof that Cameron was shooting in Washington, D.C. (Schwarzenegger had been giving the other actors a tour of the Capitol.) Cameron has mastered every job on set, and has even been known to grab a brush out of a makeup artist’s hand. “I *always* do makeup touch-ups myself, especially for blood, wounds, and dirt,” he says. “It saves so much time.” His evaluations of others’ abilities are colorful riddles. “Hiring you is like firing two good men,” he says, or “Watching him light is like watching two monkeys fuck a football.” A small, loyal band of cast and crew works with him repeatedly; they call the dark side of his personality Mij—Jim backward.

The pressures on Cameron are extreme, never mind that he has brought them on himself. His movies are among the most expensive ever made. “Terminator 2” was the first film to cost a hundred million dollars, “Titanic” the first to exceed two hundred million. But victory is sweeter after a close brush with defeat. “Terminator 2” earned five hundred and nineteen million around the world, and “Titanic,” which came out in 1997, still holds the record for global box-office: \$1.8 billion.

Cameron is fifty-five. It has been twelve years since he has made a feature film; “Avatar,” his new movie, comes out on December 18th and will have cost more than two hundred and thirty million dollars by the time it’s done. He started working on it full time four years ago, from a script he wrote in 1994. “Avatar” will be the first big-budget action blockbuster in 3-D; Cameron shot it using camera systems that he developed himself. He is a pioneer of special effects: the undulating water column of “The Abyss” and the liquid-silver man of “Terminator 2” helped to inspire the digital revolution that has transformed moviemaking in the past two decades. The digital elements of “Avatar,” he claims, are so believable that, even when they exist alongside human actors, the audience will lose

track of what is real and what is not. "This film integrates my life's achievements," he told me. "It's the most complicated stuff anyone's ever done." Another time, he said, "If you set your goals ridiculously high and it's a failure, you will fail above everyone else's success."

George Lucas popularized space opera; Steven Spielberg has perfected awe. Cameron's movies, soaked in sweat and blood and scorched by apocalyptic flames, have romance at their molten cores. Some of his most memorable characters—Sarah Connor, the heroine of the "Terminator" movies; Ellen Ripley, of "Aliens"—are mothers. The writing is a genre of its own: "tech-noir," Cameron called it after "Terminator"; his late-period style is more like gear-head schmaltz. "IN THE BLACKNESS we hear the lonely ping of a bottom sonar," the beginning of his treatment for "Titanic" reads. "Then two faint lights appear, close together . . . growing brighter. They each resolve into clusters of lights, which are soon revealed to be two DEEP SUBMERSIBLES, falling toward us. We are somewhere in the ocean deep, looking up at two subs freefalling like express elevators. . . . Soon they are fireflies, then stars. Then gone." Spielberg says, "He gets a lot of points for being a techno-brat, but he is a very emotional storyteller."

"With 'Avatar,' I thought, Forget all these chick flicks and do a classic guys' adventure movie, something in the Edgar Rice Burroughs mold, like John Carter of Mars—a soldier goes to Mars," Cameron told me. The hero of "Avatar," Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), is a paraplegic ex-marine who travels to Pandora, a moon in the Alpha Centauri star system, where there is a human colony. Humans can't breathe the air on Pandora; Jake lies in a casket-like vessel, while his consciousness, projected into an "avatar"—Vishnu-blue and nine feet tall, like the native population, the Na'vi—explores Pando-

ra's rich interior. It is a fantasy about fantasy, about the experience of sitting inert in the dark while your mind enters another world. Set roughly a hundred and twenty-five years in the future, "Avatar" is, like most speculative science fiction, a cautionary tale. Humans have turned Earth into a wasteland and, in their pursuit of a precious superconductor called Unobtainium, are beginning to do the same to Pandora. Jake, through his avatar, falls in love with a Na'vi princess, who teaches him to live in harmony with nature, and then he leads her people in an insurrection against the colonists. "Of course, the whole movie ends up being about women, how guys relate to their lovers, mothers—there's a large female presence," Cameron said. "I try to do my testosterone movie and it's a chick flick. That's how it is for me." This summer, addressing an auditorium filled with thousands of teen-age boys at Comic-Con, in San Diego—an annual convention of science-fiction, action-adventure, and fantasy fans—he made his identification with the fair sex complete. When someone in the audience asked about his next movie, he replied, "You know, it's not a great time to ask a woman if she wants to have other kids when she's crowning."

Cameron behaves as if he were the Cembattled protagonist of one of his own films—an ordinary Joe beaten on the anvil of extraordinary trials. "The words 'No' and 'That's impossible' and phrases like 'That can't be done'—that's the stuff that gives him an erection," the actor Bill Paxton, who has worked with Cameron since the early eighties, says. Cameron reserves a special quotient of his anger for suits who get in his way. "Tell your friend he's getting fucked in the ass, and if he would stop squirming it wouldn't hurt so much" was the message he once told a Fox producer to deliver to

an executive at the studio. He sees himself as essentially outside and other and alone; he bites the hand that feeds. "Even though he knew I was on his side, nobody's ever on his side," Bill Mechanic, who ran Fox Studios during the making of "Titanic," said. "It's like you're in the trenches and your infantry-mate is shooting at you, even if you're the only one there who can save his life."

There is a chivalric aspect to Cameron's antagonism; he figures his struggles in heroic terms. "I try to live with honor, even if it costs me millions of dollars and takes a long time," he says. "It's very unusual in Hollywood. Few people are trustworthy—a handshake means nothing to them. They feel they're required to keep an agreement with you only if you're successful, or they need you. I've tried not to get sucked into the Hollywood hierarchy system. Personally, I don't like it when people are deferential to me because I'm an established filmmaker. It's a blue-collar sensibility."

Cameron was born in Canada, and grew up in a small town not far from Niagara Falls. (He revoked his application for American citizenship after Bush won the election in 2004.) His father was an engineer for a paper company; his mother brought up five children, and told stories of racing stock cars and joining the women's auxiliary of the Canadian Army. Jim was the oldest, the ringleader of his siblings and the other kids in the neighborhood. "There was always some new thing that absolutely needed to get done, whether it was building a fort or an airplane or launching rockets," he told me. "We made it in the papers once, for a U.F.O. sighting over a hot-air balloon that we built and launched at night that was powered by candles." His hero was Jacques Cousteau, and although he lived four hundred miles from the ocean, he became obsessed with scuba. He learned to dive in Buffalo one February in a Y.M.C.A. pool.

At fourteen, Cameron saw the movie that made him want to make his own: Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey," the first cinematically exquisite treatment of what had traditionally been B-movie material. "I saw all these cool spacecraft and I wanted to know how the visual effects were done," he said. "I started building my own models of spaceships, from the '2001' model kit and the



"We can't all work for Goldman Sachs."

'making-of' book, which was quite thick and well researched." After he finished making "True Lies," Cameron called Kubrick, by then a recluse, and invited himself over. They spent a day, in the basement of Kubrick's house in the English countryside, watching "True Lies" at Kubrick's flatbed editing station. Cameron went over the shots—Schwarzenegger in a Harrier jet firing a missile, with the villain attached to it, through an office building and into a helicopter: *boom!*—so that Kubrick could learn how the effects were done.

When Cameron was seventeen, his father was transferred to Southern California, and the family moved to Brea, a small city in Orange County. He had left Canada without a high-school diploma, and started taking classes at Fullerton Junior College, supporting himself by working as a precision tool-and-die machinist. "My dad was a college graduate," he said. "But, see, I didn't want to do the things he thought I should—you know, something good, like engineering." He dropped out, and, when he was twenty-three, married a woman who worked as a waitress at a Bob's Big Boy. For a while, he drove a truck for a local school district. In archetypal terms, this was his period of exile and self-denial, the refusal of the call. "I just became this blue-collar guy," he said. "But I was constantly thinking as an artist, so I'm painting, drawing, writing, thinking about visual effects and filmmaking."

In Brea, Cameron met William Wisher and Randall Frakes, who also wanted to make movies, and who are still his two best friends. Eventually, they raised the money to make a short film, "Xenogenesis," starring Wisher as a futuristic man in an orange jumpsuit who battles an armored robot with a metal pincer for a hand. It got Cameron a job sculpting models for Roger Corman in L.A.

Corman's studio—a training ground for filmmakers like Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and Jonathan Demme—specialized in low-budget genre films. Cameron distinguished himself immediately, and soon he was designing sets. He was focussed—often working through the night—and he was scrappy. "He'd take all these random parts—Winnebago parts, industrial dishwashing racks, Sonotubes, a lot of paint—

and turn them into an incredible set," Paxton, who worked for Corman as a set dresser, recalled. For "Battle Beyond the Stars," Corman's takeoff on "Star Wars," Cameron was asked to design the spaceships. "His sketches were brilliant," Corman said. "The best of that type of work that I had ever seen." Each spaceship reflected the character of its pilot, and also Cameron's instinct for the iconic, literal image; to the mother ship, Nell, he gave a curvaceous shape and a pair of heaving breasts.

James Cameron doesn't go to the bathroom; he goes to the head. In his universe, there is no front and back, right and left, just fore and aft, starboard and port. He is still an avid scuba diver; when there are sharks in the water, he says, he's the first one in. Free-diving, he has held his breath for more than three minutes and reached a depth of a hundred and ten feet. ("You feel like a denizen of the deep, if only for a second," he says. "Plus, diving below the scuba divers, I like just to see the look on their faces.") He used to have a JetRanger helicopter, and owns a slew of dirt bikes, three Harleys, a Ducati, and a Ford GT—"basically a race car with a license plate"—in classic blue-and-white livery. In Corvettes, he has favored triple black—black body, black interior, black top. For pleasure, he designs submarines; the one he's working on now can go to thirty-six thousand feet, and he hopes to use it to explore the Mariana Trench, the deepest spot on earth. He signs his missives "Jim out," and, when he's working, a deep mechanical roar, like a Navy klaxon, summons him to the stage. "Dive! dive! dive!" he said, an intent look in his eyes, when I asked him what the signal meant.

I first met Cameron in April of 2008. "Avatar" was in its third year of production. For much of that time, Cameron had been working out of a couple of hangars in Playa del Rey, south of Los Angeles, where Hughes Aircraft manufactured fighter jets during the Second World War. He was sitting in his office, a small room at the edge of one of the hangars, beside a bust of a feline-looking spots: Neytiri, the Na'vi princess. "Our leading lady," Cameron called her, or just "the blue chick." He was wearing a

T-shirt that said "Scubapro" and had a pair of earphones around his neck. Despite moviegoers' associations of 3-D with schlocky horror films and animated stuff for kids, Cameron said he was resolved to work in the medium: "It gives you more of a sense of participation, involvement, and immersion. You feel like you're bearing witness, and that makes the journey feel more real." It was also a business decision. Having developed the camera technology, he knew that only a high-profile movie, such as "Avatar" promises to be, would accelerate the conversion of theatres. "I said, 'They know the product. They better get ready.' It was a little bit cheeky—a leap of faith that the screens would be there for us." That spring, there were about fifteen hundred 3-D screens in the United States; by December, there will be three times that many. ("Avatar" will also have a wide release in 2-D.)

There was a knock at the door. "I have to go make a shot," Cameron said. He walked swiftly toward the floor of the hangar, a vast industrial space that he referred to as "the performance-capture volume." The stage floor, furnished with just a low riser, had been painted battleship gray. Zoë Saldana, who plays Neytiri, stood among a group of actors wearing black unitards covered with reflective white dots: a retro vision of the computer age, Pilobolus style. The ceiling was studded with black-and-white surveillance cameras that tracked the actors' movements and positioned their performances inside a digital set—in this case, a Na'vi battle camp deep in the rain forest, where Jake's avatar is preparing the warriors to fight with bows and arrows against the high-tech human war machines. Saldana wore a special head rig fitted with a tiny camera that floated inches from her face, to capture her expressions in minute detail: the movements of her facial muscles, the contractions of her pupils, the interaction of her teeth, lips, and tongue. The data uploaded to a dozen computers banked around the room, which translated the movements of the actors onto the physiques of their digital characters, and fed the images, along with the digital set design, into the eyepiece of Cameron's "virtual camera"—essentially, a viewfinder with a monitor. For him, it was like directing a live-action shoot on Pandora. Saldana, who is five feet seven, performed

in his eyepiece as a nine-foot alien in a rain forest.

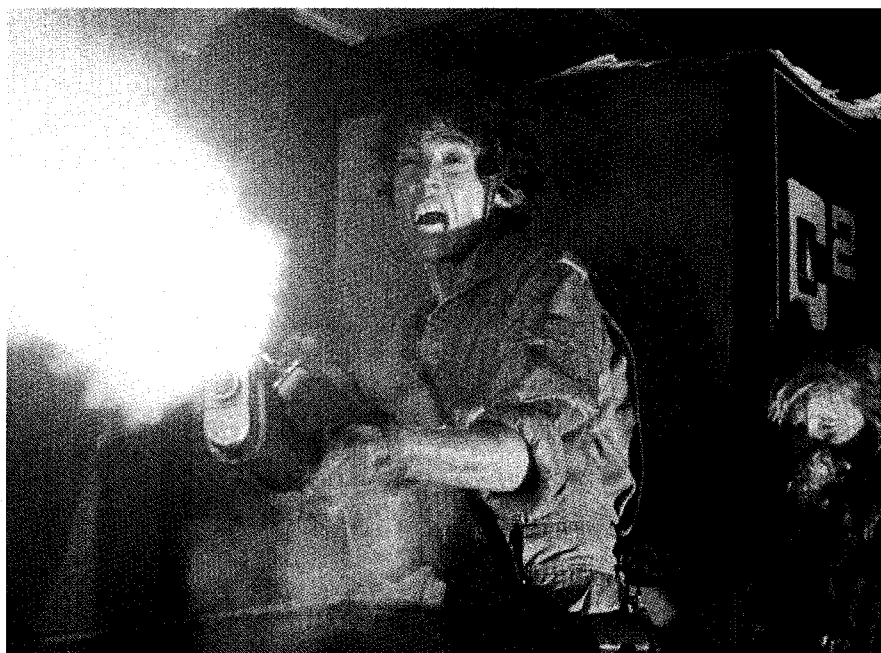
On cue, the actors began to make strange trilling sounds, ejectives and glottal stops and rolled “r”s: Na’vi. Cameron stopped the scene. “When Jake goes”—Cameron uttered a mellifluous sentence in Na’vi—“you go, ‘Whoop! Whoop!’ ”

Back in his office, Cameron played an

building has had more college than I have.”

All directors have a God complex; Cameron takes his unusually seriously. For “Avatar,” he worked with a linguist to develop the Na’vi language, inspired by fragments of Maori he picked up in New Zealand years ago. He based Pandora, and its myriad flora (spike tears, cliff

the virtual camera, he is both cinematographer and camera operator, working in his favorite style, handheld, for what he calls “an edgy, subjective quality.” The camera eliminates the need for cable cars, helicopters, or cranes, allowing him to shoot from any vantage point he chooses. “When I say, ‘Make me three to one,’ what I’m saying is ‘Make me eighteen



Sigourney Weaver and Carrie Henn in “*Aliens*” (1986), and Linda Hamilton in “*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*” (1991).

unfinished scene from “Avatar” on a large screen. The renderings were crude, like paper cutouts: the graphic sophistication of a nineteen-nineties video game. Neytiri—hipless, lean, with proportions to make Barbie look like a Cabbage Patch Kid—crouched on a tree limb high above the forest floor. She spotted Jake’s avatar for the first time, and took aim. The next shot was much more evolved. Neytiri’s skin was tactile and radiant; her eyes were huge and green and flecked with light, like five-dollar marbles from Conran. “This is ninety or ninety-five per cent done,” Cameron said. “By the way, we didn’t have the equipment when we started this. It took nine months to build the computer model and to get it right. It’s incredibly computationally complex, but now we’re able to replicate the interaction of muscle under skin.” He stopped the footage on a closeup of Neytiri’s face. “She exists only as a big string of ones and zeroes,” he said, as if he could not quite believe it himself. “Computing a single frame of this takes thirty hours.” He paused. “Everybody in this

slouchers, stinger ivy) and fauna (direhorses, banshees, slinths), partly on the creatures of the coral reefs and kelp forests he has seen at the abyssal depths. He hired a team of artists to execute his ideas, but reserved one creature for himself: the thanator, a six-legged black pantherlike beast, twenty-four feet long, covered in plate scales, with a reptilian double set of jaws and a threat display resembling that of a fan lizard. “The thanator is the baddest, meanest predator the planet had to offer,” Neville Page, the lead creature designer, said. “As Jim put it in the treatment, a thanator can eat an Alien for dessert. He wanted to outdo himself, outdo the Alien Queen.”

“Creating a universe is daunting,” George Lucas said. “I’m glad Jim is doing it—there are only a few people in the world who are nuts enough to. I did it with ‘Star Wars,’ and now he’s trying to challenge that. It’s a lot of work. I do believe Jim will take this further out than anyone’s ever conceived of.”

Cameron inserts himself into every aspect of the filmmaking process. With

feet tall,” he said. “At that point, I’ve become a techno crane. If I say, ‘Make me twenty to one,’ I’m a helicopter.” The Na’vi, too, are an extension of Cameron. He mentioned that he is a lefty. “Guess what,” he said. “The Na’vi are all left-handed now.” He taught Zoë Saldana how to shoot her bow, as he envisioned it. “It’s a two-fingered inverted draw past the head, like a Samurai,” he said, tracing the shape in the air over his left shoulder. “The archery instructor came and said, ‘Do you want me to teach them archery or do you want me to teach them *this*? This would never work.’ I said, ‘See that bush?’ It was a hundred and fifty feet away. I nailed it.”

The next time I saw Cameron, the lights were low. A year had passed. His hair was longer and whiter, and he had grown a small paunch; later, I learned that he had broken a tooth and hadn’t bothered to fix it. (“I don’t smile that broadly anyway,” he said.) He was alone, moving slowly, grapevining his left foot gingerly over his right leg as he

20TH CENTURY FOX/EVERETT COLLECTION; TRISTAR PICTURES/PHOTOFEST



OWN THE ORIGINAL

"Nothing yet, sir, but we have found Elvis."

by Christopher Weyant

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There be more blood on my
L.

g to play it that the arrow
is," Cameron said.

, Jim!" Landau said. He is
he film PG-13.

Avatar's live-action scenes

New Zealand in 2007,
y, Cameron had to get a

That night at half past eight, Cameron
marched upstairs, two at a time, to a mess
of cubicles he called "the lab," where art-
ists and programmers were stationed at
computer screens. The lab smelled of
coffee. Nearly everyone had chin hair.
Cameron headed for a screening room for
his nightly video conference with Weta,
Peter Jackson's digital-effects studio, in



Caprio and Kate Winslet in "Titanic" (1997).

ing inside an "armored
n," or AMP suit. The suit,
ished film, will be a com-
al effects and physical set,
ece of military hardware,
ink. A prop guy asked if
ave any bearing on how
reacted when attacked.
in good question," Cam-
e already established the
e suit is grabbed it looks
y." Cameron put on a
ice—his rendition of a

"How come the suit
right way? The four-
w the film, in my base-
questioned the editorial in-
laughed, and then grew
, as if aware that he had
ng jinxy: he should be so
—shirt with schmutz
aid, fingering the fabric
ry wound. He looked
nds, which were now
e blood. "I have so much
ds, from all the movies,
ad psychically," he said.

New Zealand, which was responsible for
taking the basic renderings done by Cam-
eron's team and turning them into photo-
realistic images: the bright, sentient eyes;
the muscle under skin; the movement of
wind, water, hair. Jackson says that "Ava-
tar's" digital characters are more nuanced
and vivid than any that have come before.
"I've seen people looking at 'Avatar' shots,
being convinced they are somehow look-
ing at actors in makeup," he wrote me in
an e-mail.

Cameron, Landau, and several others
sat in the dark, facing a large screen. A
smaller screen showed six artists from
Weta, at a conference table in New Zea-
land. "Avatar" has nearly three thousand
effects shots; Cameron will review some
of them as many as twenty times. He is
an exacting critic, and an exuberant
showoff, and the meetings provide a cap-
tive audience. Any disagreement is re-
solved with the indisputable logic of an
older sibling who has invented a game
and deigned to let his kid brother play:
his universe, he wins. "I hate this fucking
thing, but I can be very specific about it,"

he said, when an image of a rock arch sacred to the Na'vi came up on the screen. "This looks like petrified wood," he said, circling the offending part with a red laser pointer. "It has a longitudinal grain structure. It looks very fragile to me. This hard, crystalline structure looks like *barn* wood. We want to say that this arch formed as igneous rock, that it's a lava formation that got eroded, but it's fracturing out along the crystal planes of minerals."

At one point, Landau asked if Jake's avatar's ears looked a touch too red in a closeup shot. "When you direct your movie with nine-foot-tall blue people, you can do whatever you want," Cameron said. "The ears are red when they're backlit. That's how they *look*."

"Agreed," Landau said cheerfully. He seemed used to it.

The meeting ended on a boisterous note. "That fuckin' rocks!" Cameron called out in response to an image of a snarling maw of thin blue-veined tissue, the mouth of the pterodactyl-like banshee that Jake's avatar domesticates for his ride. "Look at the gill-like membrane on the side of the mouth, its transmission of light, all the secondary color saturation on the tongue, and that maxilla bone. I love what you did with the translucence on the teeth, and the way the quadrate bone racks the teeth forward. It's a sharky thing. As wacky as this creature is, it looks completely real. Maybe I'm getting high on my own supply." He was practically out of breath. "The banshee lives! He's a fierce-looking sonuvabitch."

Home, for Cameron, is a fortress of preparedness. Since 1992, he has lived in Malibu, in a gated community called Serra Retreat, a patch of scrubby hillside across the highway from the beach. Mel Gibson lives in Serra Retreat; Britney Spears used to be Cameron's neighbor there. Cameron's place is a custard-colored nineteen-eighties Spanish house, with a red tile roof, in a small cul-de-sac; at the end of his driveway, there is a gate, beyond which stands a red Humvee platform fire truck and a uniformed security guard, with a clipboard and a badge. Ex-military buddies of his younger brother John David, who served as a marine in Iraq during the first Gulf War, sometimes provide additional security.

Cameron's imagination was shaped by

AU REVOIR

We did not go to Versailles.
The ocean did not turn over.
The moon remained unmanned
And two teams called out in turn *Red Rover Red Rover*.

Did Fisher-Price furnish our minds
with a transportable *imaginaire*?
George Bush the first said he liked pork rinds.
My name not Mary my self contrary.

Things are always terrible
for some people. The question
is the ratio of the palpable hurt
to the general session

of life in an era. Narcissism
the Hall of Mirrors multiplying
me and you and me no schism
between ourselves and our lying

ideals. This is another first-world poem
annoying in all its presumption
its feckless tourism presupposing a home
and its hubris misregarding itself as gumption.

the Cold War; the threat of nuclear annihilation is a recurring theme. But he also admires the military and its accessories. "I suppose you could say I believe in peace through superior firepower," he told me. "I don't believe that the human race is going to suddenly evolve to the point that we can all join hands and sing 'Kumbaya.'" He learned to shoot—shotguns, assault rifles, pistols—in the early eighties, when he was writing "The Terminator." "I didn't want to write like an idiot, based on some kind of comic-book knowledge," he said. "I do a lot of things in the pursuit of creating a patina of reality in what is basically fantasy." He has continued his education, training with a handgun expert on a course with pop-up targets, and spending a lot of time in the desert with his friends, shooting up watermelons and jalopies with an AK-47.

Five years ago, Cameron bought the house next door, which had belonged to George C. Scott. Same architect, same style. It contains a post-production facility, and has editing rooms and a screening room. One recent morning, a young male assistant was in the kitchen, sorting silverware, while another made coffee. A

tilled center island was laden with pudgy chocolate-chip muffins and canisters of pretzels: suburban-abundance comfort food, for people working around the clock. Cameron came in at nine and poured himself a decaf. (He stopped drinking caffeine after "Terminator 2.") He was wearing jeans and an Atlantic-blue button-down shirt. He walked out the back door to a large pool and patio. Lawn chairs and chaises and glass-topped tables suggested various forms of leisure. Cameron looked at the furniture uncertainly, as if he had never contemplated using it before. He chose a spot under an umbrella. Belle, one of three black German shepherds Cameron keeps, dropped a slimy tennis ball at his feet.

"We have a big fire problem here," he said. He mentioned that he has his own pump house. "We take the pool water, mix it with Class A foam, and pump it out over the whole property. Everybody else just runs for the hills." He threw his hands up and did a squeaky voice. "Oh, my God!" We sit and wait. Put on our yellow coats and our breathing gear and wait. And, you know what? It's impressive. When these hills light up with a

Autobiography cannot anymore be spiritual
and the obviously sexual dimensions
of experience laid out before all
a spatchcocked chicken the cook mentioned

she'd make you for dinner
after she serviced the young monsieur
on the staircase. *It's hierarchy or chaos*
mister sd the structuralist seer

a woman no friend
to women but no enemy
either. How to end
the impasse. How to be

perfectly complicit to just the degree
you deserve asked the dominatrix
by which I mean post-structuralist
for whom the question of rubber vs. latex

moves us far beyond rational choice . . .

—Maureen N. McLane

hundred-foot-tall wall of flames coming over the top of the hill there, you feel like it's Armageddon."

Cameron has had five wives (waitress, producer, director, actress, actress). He has four children, ranging in age from sixteen to two, and a nineteen-year-old stepson. Since 2000, he has been married to Suzy Amis, who had a small role in "Titanic." She no longer acts; several years ago, she founded Muse Elementary, a private school with an emphasis on ecological consciousness, in a setting that is, according to its Web site, a "dye-free, toxin-free, pesticide-free zone."

Before Amis, Cameron was married to Linda Hamilton, who played Sarah Connor, a woman hunted by unstoppable cyborgs, in the "Terminator" films. As Hamilton recalls it, she and Cameron didn't get along particularly well during the first shoot. "My joke after that movie was, That man is definitely on the side of the machines," she said. For the sequel, in which Sarah Connor has become a near-psychotic paramilitary fighter deranged by her foreknowledge of the imminent destruction of the world, Hamilton spent a year on a mer-

ciless fat-free diet, and trained with a former Mossad agent, who taught her to strip weapons blindfolded while he threw things at her and asked for her identification number. She got so that she could escape from L.A.P.D. handcuffs using just a paper clip.

Not long after Cameron finished shooting "Terminator 2," he got divorced from his wife at the time, the director Kathryn Bigelow. (They are still friends: Bigelow says that when she got the finished script for "The Hurt Locker," her latest film, Cameron was the first person whose opinion she sought out.) He and Hamilton got together, and moved into the house in Serra Retreat. "The very first night, I realized it was a mistake," she told me. "He was the controlling director. The person I'd seen on set came back to life—we're in his environment, and I didn't have much of a say-so." She found herself on survivalist weekends in the desert, flying kit planes and shooting fruit, and riding shotgun in Cameron's Corvette. "It was Jimbo who had the love of fast cars, but as the warrior bride I was on the back of the motorcycle," she said. She wanted to get mar-

ried, but Cameron, she says, was not interested in a conventional domestic life: "He used to say to me, 'Anybody can be a father or a husband. There are only five people in the world who can do what I do, and I'm going for that.'" She got pregnant, and moved out when their daughter, Josephine—Cameron's first child—was nine months old.

Despite living apart, Cameron and Hamilton remained a couple, and he proved to be a devoted father. "We'd have a fight at Geoffrey's"—a surf-and-turf restaurant on the Pacific Coast Highway—"and go our separate ways," she said. "Much alcohol was consumed by Linda Hamilton." After six years, when Cameron was making "Titanic," they married. Hamilton was going to get scuba-certified, but the relationship unravelled too rapidly for that. "In the end, it was an eight-month marriage, and he went off with someone who's much better suited to him," Hamilton said. They divorced, and Cameron and Amis married shortly thereafter.

Wisher, Cameron's old friend, says that strong women are one of the constants in Cameron's life: "He likes to write about 'em and he likes to marry 'em. If there's one or two themes that run through his life and work, that's at the top of the list. That and self-determination. 'There is no fate but what you make'—that line from 'The Terminator.' That's his credo, I'm sure."

Hollywood metonymy for female characters is "handbags," also known as "girlfriend parts"—in other words, incidental sidekicks. Gale Anne Hurd, Cameron's second wife, and the producer of his first three films, says that Cameron always found women more interesting than men as protagonists. "He felt that they were underutilized in sci-fi, action, and fantasy," she said. "And that just about everything you could explore in a male action hero could be explored better with a woman."

In 1981, Cameron had the idea that became his first autonomous movie. It came to him, as he tells it, in the post-Freudian form of divine intercession: a dream. He was in Rome, trying to see a cut of "Piranha 2," a bikinis-and-blood exploitation flick that he had been hired to direct. (He had been fired by the Italian executive producer, and wanted to get

his name taken off the film.) He was sick and broke, and staying in a tiny pensione. One night, he said, he dreamed of “a chrome skeleton emerging out of a fire.” Then he sketched the figure cut in half and crawling after a woman. He said, “I thought, That was cool. I’ve never seen *that* in a movie before.”

Cameron came home and recruited Wisner and Frakes to help him with a storyline centered on the chrome skeleton he had begun to think of as the terminator. He analyzed the common traits of the ten most successful movies of all time: an average person in extraordinary jeopardy was a major trope. His story posited a future when much of Earth has been destroyed in a catastrophic nuclear war; out of the rubble, a race of machines rises up and tries to eliminate the few remaining human beings. To win the war for good, the machines send a cyborg terminator back in time, to 1984 Los Angeles, to kill the woman, Sarah Connor, a waitress at a burger joint who will later give birth to the leader of the human resistance.

“My tether to directing was effects, but effects are expensive,” Cameron says. “I said, It’s gotta have a fantastic element, but we’ll shoot on locations—it’ll be something set on Earth but with a few scenes in the future.” The script caused a stir in Hollywood. It went out to Arnold Schwarzenegger, the bodybuilder best known for playing the title role in “Conan the Barbarian”; he was asked to consider playing Kyle Reese, a human from the future charged with protecting Sarah Connor from the cyborg. (O.J. Simpson was being talked about for the terminator.) Schwarzenegger says that, reading the script, he considered everything that the terminator would have to do: repress all emotion, shoot without blinking, speak like a recording from a Dictaphone. Over lunch with Cameron, he said how excited he was to play Reese, but also shared his ideas for the cyborg. At the end of the meal, Schwarzenegger picked up the check. Cameron, who was sharing an apartment in Tarzana with Wisner, and driving a beat-up two-door Chevrolet, had no money.

Cameron persuaded Schwarzenegger that he was much better suited to the terminator role. Schwarzenegger recalls, “He starts almost talking like a psychiatrist, and telling me the reasons why I’m

not interested in it, because I come from an Austrian background, and maybe someone would give me less dialogue because I’m not as understandable. But, he says, ‘Don’t worry about the amount of dialogue. It will be one of the most memorable characters of the year, maybe even of the decade.’ ”

“The Terminator,” a six-million-dollar movie, made eighty. Schwarzenegger’s lines in that film and its sequel, where he plays a good cyborg fighting an evil liquid-silver one, were so memorable—“*Hasta la vista, baby*”; “I’ll be back”—that Schwarzenegger, now the governor of California, has made them part of his political career. “We’re going to terminate global warming,” he said, announcing a new environmental initiative, and “We’re going to say ‘*Hasta la vista*’ to crime.” People around the world know him as the Governator. But it is Sarah Connor who has emerged as the cult figure of the “Terminator” films: a full-bore female action hero, the mother of a generation of Xenas, Buffys, and Lara Crofts.

As a young writer, Cameron borrowed a trick from Walter Hill, who, working on the outer-space horror movie “Alien,” took a character (a young ensign named Ripley) that was originally male and, with minimal revision, made the character female. (Sigourney Weaver played the role, Ellen Ripley.) As Cameron described the technique, “You write dialogue for a guy and then change the name.” After “The Terminator,” Cameron was hired to write and direct the sequel to “Alien.” His movie, “Aliens,” intensified Ripley’s machismo, and gave her an important new motivation: to save a little girl whose parents have been killed by aliens. Weaver says that she was shocked when she showed up for work, not having read the script’s stage directions carefully. “I had been working for gun control since college,” she said. “I get to the set and, I’m telling you, I had never seen so many guns, all designed by Jim. And then there was my weapon, this super-weapon—a machine-gun-bazooka-flame-thrower all in one.” Her performance was nominated for an Academy Award, a rare recognition for the star of a sci-fi action film.

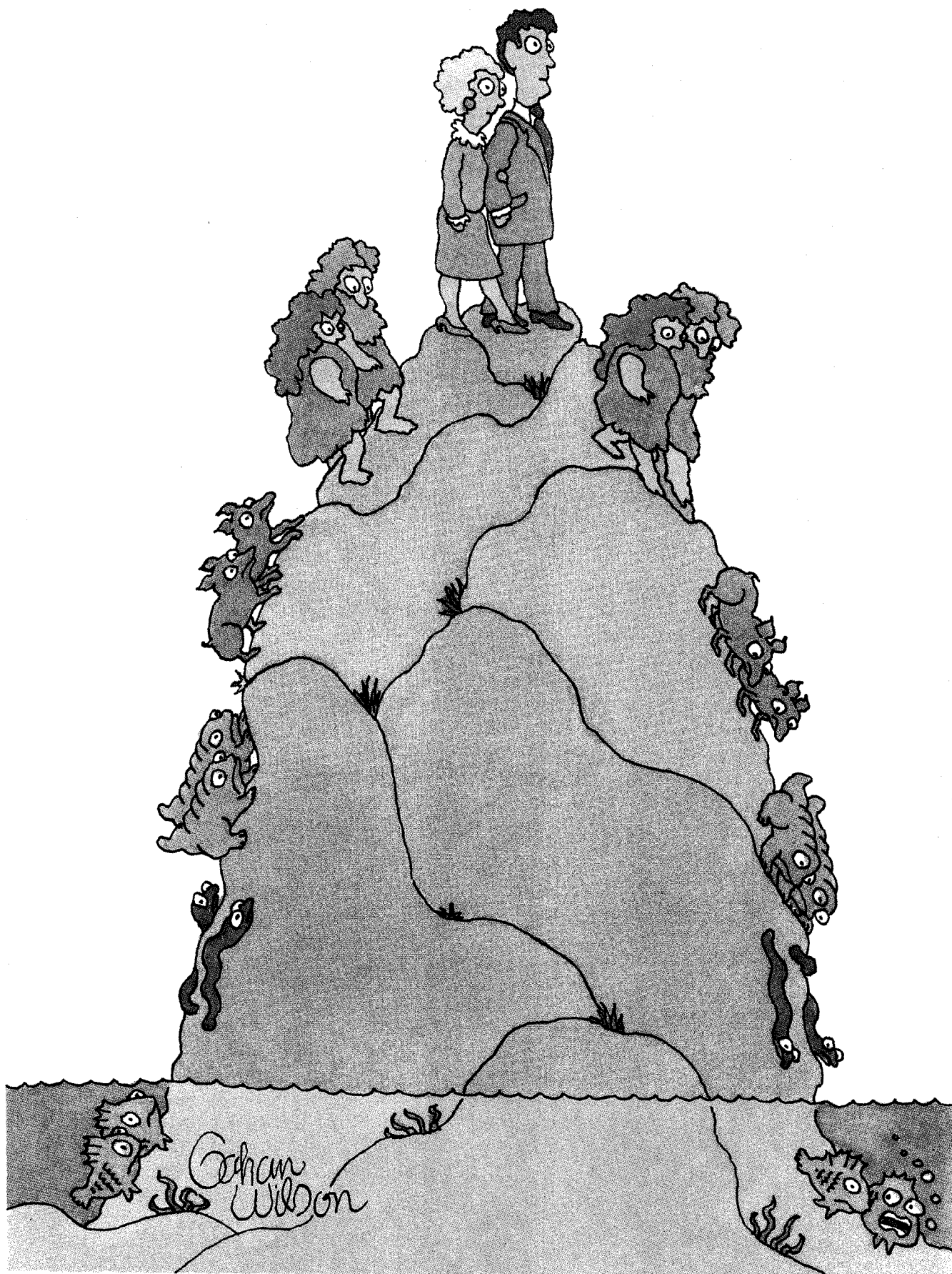
In the pièce de résistance, Weaver, who also has a large role in “Avatar,” dons a metal-plated hydraulic suit and con-

fronts the Alien Queen, a bony black monster with dripping translucent fangs, like a T. Rex skeleton exhibit come to life, whose goo-encrusted ovipositor is a Satanic vision of the procreative principle. As an instance of feminist iconography it perhaps leaves something to be desired. “Get away from her, you *bitch!*” Weaver spits when the Queen goes for the little girl, invoking an archetype that is more catfight than warrior goddess, before she engages her in hand-to-hand combat and takes the old girl down.

To Cameron, making a movie is going to war, and he is a Spartan general: he comes home carrying his shield or on it. It is a posture that requires a good deal of self-parody. Before beginning production on “The Abyss” (1989), the most ambitious underwater movie ever attempted, he went to see Leonard Goldberg, then the president of Fox, which was financing the film. “He said, I want you to know one thing—once we embark on this adventure and I start to make this movie, the only way you’ll be able to stop me is to kill me,” Goldberg told me. “You looked into those eyes and you knew he meant it.”

Making “The Abyss” was brutal. “It was a battle fought underwater,” one crew member said—and it was over budget and behind schedule before shooting even began. The story, about a deep-ocean oil-drilling crew called upon to prevent a nuclear catastrophe, while dealing with a hostile Navy SEALs unit and visitations from a marine alien, takes place almost entirely at the bottom of the sea. Cameron built the set in Gaffney, South Carolina, in the containment vessel of an abandoned (and never activated) nuclear-power facility, which he filled with eight million gallons of water. The principal actors and much of the crew had to be scuba-certified. As part of the production design, the actors wore helmets that were lit from within. Cameron wore a similar helmet, but his contained a one-way communications device that broadcast his every grunt and breath through underwater speakers all over the set. “He *loved* it,” Al Giddings, the underwater D.P., who designed the system, said. None of the crew members could talk back, or to one another, and some of them came up with their own sign language. Thumbs up meant “We’re

SKETCHBOOK BY GAHAN WILSON



"Well, that was a total waste of time!"

fucked." Thumb and forefinger up meant "We're double-fucked."

The crew was in the water ten hours a day; in ten weeks, the production went through ten thousand five hundred air tanks. "When I first got there, it was, like, 'Put me in the water! Put me in the water!'" Vince Pace, who built the underwater lighting, said. "About four weeks into it I was, like, 'Listen, I've been in the water. Put Jack in the water.' Two, three months into it you're saying, 'If you put me in the water, I'm going to kill you.'" To break up the water surface and minimize reflection, the tank was filled with tiny black polypropylene beads, which made their way into noses, ears, and mouths. Infections were rampant, even though the water had enough chlorine in it to turn an electric-blue dive suit gray in a day or two, and bleach the hair and eyebrows of the crew albino-white. Leonard Goldberg got pneumonia after visiting for an afternoon.

The weather turned cold, and a black tarp that had covered the tank, blocking out unwanted light, tore. They started shooting nights. They would surface for lunch at 2 A.M., and their fragile white hair would freeze and break off. Cameron took to wearing a T-shirt—it reappeared during the "Titanic" shoot—that said "Time Means Nothing in the Face of Creativity." Fox, worried that it had a runaway production on its hands, sent a veteran producer to the set. He arrived

in a rented Cadillac, wearing a suit, to tell Cameron and Hurd that they had to scale back the shooting schedule and the budget. It didn't go well. "There are two things about Jim," Mikael Salomon, the cinematographer on "The Abyss," told me. "You shouldn't call him Jimmy, and you shouldn't touch him if you don't know him very well. He did both."

The subplot of "The Abyss" (or "The Abuse," as the crew came to call it) is that Bud Brigman (Ed Harris), the leader of the drilling crew—Cameron's treatment describes him as "a peculiar mixture of intelligence and hard-headedness, built-in leadership qualities and laid-back casualness, with a good dose of disregard for authority thrown in"—is getting divorced from his wife, Lindsey (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio), an aggressive, no-nonsense engineer. Despite their wretched situation, they are forced to work together. As it happened, Cameron and Hurd were also in the midst of a divorce. Her T-shirt said "Life's Abyss and Then You Dive."

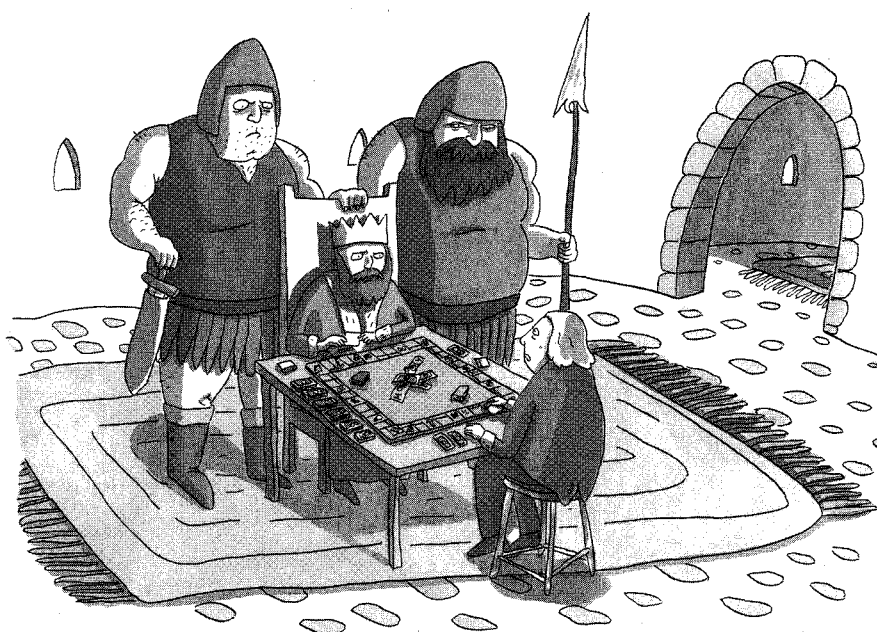
Cameron has an uncanny ability to make people want to see him fail. This is an unheroic characteristic, but sometimes it serves the storyline. In the mid-nineties, he sold Fox on "Titanic," a tale of forbidden love between an upper-crust girl and a steerage-class boy, set on board a sinking ship. To many in Hollywood, the project seemed ridiculous—

didn't everybody already know the end?—and more so as it became clear just how big the undertaking was.

Cameron didn't care. He designed a seven-hundred-and-seventy-five-foot-long set—a seven-eighths-scale replica of the "Titanic," which could tilt on hydraulics and be flooded at will. There was no tank big enough to contain it, so Fox, for the first time in its history, built a studio from the ground up, in Rosarito, Mexico. There were thousands of actors; Cameron directed, over a loudspeaker, while sitting on top of a tower crane. A few weeks into the shoot, Bill Mechanic, who had recently become the chairman and C.E.O. of Fox Studios, and who was therefore the first in line to lose his job should "Titanic" fall apart, drove down to Rosarito for what he thought was a friendly visit. There he discovered a production in chaos: no one knew how much money had been spent, and there were stacks of unpaid bills. "We were losing three out of every five shooting days," Mechanic said. "Why? Because of Jim not compromising. There were problems due to water. They had to wait for the costumes to dry, wait for complex riggings. That's where it started becoming a battlefield."

Mechanic brought on a producer, Marty Katz, to sort it out; Katz says he found that the production was already tens of millions of dollars over budget. Trying to be conciliatory, Katz asked Cameron to consider him a friend. Katz told me, "He says, 'Friends? Friends? I don't need friends. You're not my friend.' I say, 'I'm the only friend this production has at the studio. We're in trouble. They don't know when the bleeding's going to stop.' He looks at me with a twinkle in his eye, and says, 'Friend of the picture is good. But, by the way, our little conversation here just cost a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.'" And he turned around and went back to work.

Cameron gave up his directing and producing fees—worth roughly ten million dollars—keeping only about a million, his payment for the script. He says that he also offered to relinquish his profit participation in the film, but the studio, believing that it would still lose money on "Titanic," demanded points on his next film, too. (He claims that he told Mechanic, "You may fuck yourself"; Mechanic remembers a more amenable



Kanin

"Um, O.K., yes, Boardwalk for Connecticut Avenue."

Cameron. In any case, after "Titanic" 's success, Fox restored what Cameron had forfeited.)

The media delighted in "Titanic" 's troubles. *Time* ran a story with the title "Glub, Glub Glub . . . Can James Cameron's extravagant 'Titanic' avoid disaster?" While the movie's early scenes were being filmed, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, someone sprinkled PCP in the chowder; the perpetrator was never caught but was thought to be a disgruntled crew member. Cameron had the presence of mind to stick his finger down his throat, and was one of the few who didn't spend the night in the emergency room. Reports came from the Rosarito set of gruelling night shoots and dangerous working conditions. (The Screen Actors Guild investigated but did not find any violations.) Crew members slept on their feet, leaning against walls. Before the movie came out, Kate Winslet told the *L.A. Times* that she'd chipped an elbow bone, and that she'd nearly drowned.

"There were a lot of stories swirling around 'Titanic' that had no foundation whatsoever," Cameron said recently. "All that stuff where they're freezing to death at the end was shot in eighty-two-degree water—a bath, basically. The biggest problem we had was that the steam coming off the water was stopping us from shooting. The breath was added in later—sometimes breath is even put in to hide steam in the background that's coming off the water." He caught himself. "It's not steam, it's water vapor—my father would correct me on that."

"Titanic" missed its release date, in July, 1997, and the budget, originally set at a hundred and ten million dollars, swelled to two hundred, the largest in Hollywood history. Cameron was miserable, convinced that he had ruined his career. "There was such a sense of gloom and doom and catastrophe around the whole production," he said. A very favorable response from a test audience in Minneapolis—in well over three hours, only three people got up to use the bathroom—did not allay the fear. Fox calculated that even if "Titanic" outperformed the most successful three-hour movie in memory—"Dances with Wolves," which won the Academy Award—the studio would still lose seventy million dollars.

The movie came out just before Christmas. Kenneth Turan, the film

critic for the *L.A. Times*, gave "Titanic" a scathing review. "Just as the hubris of headstrong shipbuilders who insisted that the Titanic was unsinkable led to an unparalleled maritime disaster, so Cameron's overweening pride has come unnecessarily close to capsizing this project," he wrote, calling it "a hackneyed, completely derivative copy of old Hollywood romances." Turan, who continued to write critically of the film even as it became a box-office phenomenon, was besieged with hate mail. One correspondent, a teen-age girl, sent him a letter to which she'd stapled her multiple "Titanic" ticket stubs. In March, Cameron delivered his own rebuttal, which was published in the arts section of the *L.A. Times*. It was incisive, and maybe more revealing than he knew. "Poor Kenny. He sees himself as the lone voice crying in the wilderness, righteous but not heeded by the blind and dumb 'great unwashed' around him. It must be a great burden to be cursed with such clear vision when your misguided flock bray past you, like lemmings, unmindful." Even now, Cameron resents the media's treatment of the film. "We were branded as the biggest idiots in movie history," he told me. "They were just sharpening their knives so they could really take the film apart. Then they couldn't. So, fuck them. Fuck 'em all."

"Titanic" won eleven Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director, tying the previous record-holder, "Ben-Hur." Accepting the directing award, Cameron, in a long tailcoat and a gingery-blond goatee, quoted a line from the movie, uttered by Jack Dawson, the steerage-class boy astounded by his good fortune. "I'm the king of the world!" he crowed to the audience, brandishing his statue overhead. It was Cameron at his most vulnerable, exulting in his character's improbable arc from truck driver to Oscar winner, and it just made everybody hate him more.

"Mars is one of your better planets," Cameron says. "Because you could actually land there, and it's close enough to get to, and it's close enough to the sun that it's not a big ball of ice." He is a member in good standing of the Mars Society, a private organization whose membership includes science-fiction writers and astronauts (Gregory Benford,

Buzz Aldrin), and whose purpose is to advocate for the human exploration and settlement of that planet. "We should ultimately have colonies on Mars, for purposes of expanding the footprint of the human race," Cameron says. He shares with the Mars Society the opinion that NASA—on whose advisory council he sat for three years—has become too risk-averse. "We've become cowards, basically," he says. "As a society, we're just fat and happy and comfortable and we've lost the edge."

Ten years ago, with Vince Pace, who had worked on "The Abyss," Cameron started to develop a 3-D camera. He wanted to use it to shoot a dramatic, gritty, realistic Mars movie that would present a compelling case for planetary exploration. At the time, stereoscopic cameras weighed four hundred and fifty pounds and were the size of washing machines—so cumbersome that when Cameron shot a 3-D short for a "Terminator" ride at the Universal theme park the stuntmen had to run at half speed for the camera to keep up with them. Cameron challenged Pace to come up with what he called a "holy-grail camera": lightweight, quiet, and capable of shooting in 2-D and 3-D simultaneously.

While researching his Mars movie, Cameron made friends with a number of astronauts. In 2000, he went to Russia to train for a flight aboard the Soviet-era spacecraft Soyuz; the idea was that he would spend thirty days at the International Space Station, do a space walk, and film the whole thing in 3-D. He'd catch a ride home on the NASA space shuttle. It would be like living inside Kuibrick's "2001."

But, before bringing a camera into space, Cameron had to prove it safe. He decided that the best way to test the camera's worthiness was "combat at sea," and he took it to the site of the Titanic wreck. His brother Mike, an engineer (and once his fort-building and rocket-launching accomplice), designed two remote-operated vehicles, each equipped with an early prototype of the 3-D camera that Cameron and Pace were developing, and nimble enough to explore the ship's interior. Late in the summer of 2001, with Vince Pace as D.P., Jim and Mike spent several weeks diving the wreck in submersibles launched from a Russian research vessel, recording im-

ages of places that only the ship's passengers had ever seen. In the middle of the expedition, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked, and the trip was cut short. The mission to the space station was put on hold, but the footage from the dive was released as "Ghosts of the Abyss," a 3-D documentary.

Cameron also made an underwater filmmaking expedition to the hydrothermal vents, home to extremophiles, organisms that thrive in environments toxic to most life forms. Conditions at the vents are thought to resemble those elsewhere in the solar system, so Cameron invited astrobiologists and an astronaut from NASA and the Jet Propulsion Lab, and a scientist affiliated with the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute, to accompany him. Over sixteen months, Cameron and his team made forty dives at ten sites in the Atlantic and the Pacific. One of the NASA scientists kept a sleep log: three hours a night. "If OSHA were there, the conditions wouldn't necessarily be condoned," she said. People were tired and stressed and sometimes afraid. It was Cameron's idea of fun.

The third act of "Avatar" contains what Jon Landau, the producer, calls "the mother of all movie battles." In May, Cameron was shooting a few last live-action battle scenes. Time was running out. I met him in the performance-capture volume, where he was reviewing the primitive digital renderings; it was the last day to get them to Weta, if they were to be included in the film. "I'm like a Gatling gunner," he said, swivelling among computer stations and firing off critiques. On one hip he wore a walkie-talkie labelled "Jim"; when word came over it that the crew was ready for him in the hangar where the live-action filming took place, he began to move so quickly I had to jog to keep up. Outside was a white golf cart with a sign on it that read "Director Only"; the other hangar was across the street. He climbed into the front seat. "I'm always reluctant to drive around in this," he said. "It's such a dorky director thing to do." He stepped on it, and, as we chugged along, the pavement gave way to dirt. "Off-roading," he said sardonically.

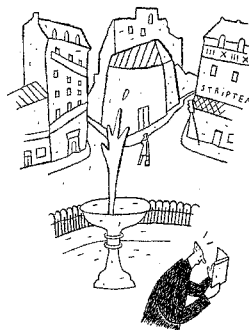
As we entered the hangar, a crew member handed us goggles and earplugs. Cameron walked toward a bunker,

backed by a green screen and surrounded by a berm of sandbags covered in netting, where six muscular actors, with shaved heads and tattoos and beat-up camouflage clothing, were huddled uncertainly around several machine guns on turrets. Cameron climbed the berm, pulled himself into the bunker, and picked up an enormous gun. He crouched low and pointed, sweeping imaginary bullets across the room. "The fire's moving across from front to back: *cho-cho-cho-cho-chooo*"—he imitated machine-gun fire. "Like that." He hefted himself out and slid down the sandbags, to the ground.

Cameron stationed himself in front of the bunker, at a cart with two steering wheels to control the pan and tilt of the 3-D camera, which was on a crane overhead. A screen mounted on a nearby dolly showed the virtual world into which the day's performances would be layered: digital banshees attacking a bunker.

"Fire in the hole!" the first A.D. yelled.

Cameron looked around excitedly as the machine guns started to rattle and shells popped off in every direction. He snapped his fingers nervously. The acrid smell of gun smoke filled the air. Pointing to his left forearm, he said, "I have a piece of shrapnel right here from 'Terminator 2' that never came out." Tiny, tight smile. "We made up the three barrel guns," he said. "The two waist guns are .30-calibre machine guns modified for the movie. It's an older model, a Vietnam-era M60. The idea is that Pandora has such a hot, humid climate, with incredibly powerful magnetic fields, that they can't use sophisticated energy weapons. A lot of the equipment is retrofitted, from their perspective, because it works on Pandora. So you've got vehicles that are more consistent with twentieth-century warfare." His face was flushed and happy. "It's all just an excuse to do helicopters versus pterodactyls," he said.



Cameron called "Action!" and stood, his feet two feet apart, spinning the pan-and-tilt wheels rapidly, like a captain on the ship's bridge, as the soldiers in the bunker fired at nothing, and, in the composite shot in Cameron's monitor, dive-bombing banshees were picked off one by one.

One morning in late July, Cameron was at Fox mixing a twenty-five-minute excerpt of "Avatar," which he was going to present at Comic-Con the following week. He had given the engineers a temporary sound-effects score to work from, and he was dissatisfied with the results.

"If we had to ship this thing in, like, two hours I'd send the fucking temp," Cameron hissed. "It was built with a real opinion. And that opinion is not gonna change, 'cause I *personally* cut it *myself*. My advice to you: Listen to it, study it, match what's there. Your principle, like a surgeon with the Hippocratic Oath, should be, Do no harm." The room was quiet. The sound engineer gathered his courage, and, like a hostage trying to appease a crazy person with a knife, began to repeat back Cameron's words slowly. "Let me start by trying to apply the physician's model to this, so that we can start working together," he said, and they began again, matching banshee wing flaps to banshee-wing-flap sounds.

"This is going to be a long day," one of the engineers said, when Cameron left the room.

"He gave us the same thing on 'Terminator'—'Go back to my temp,'" another replied. "But he was much nicer about it then."

At Comic-Con, "Avatar" was shown in Hall H, which seats more than six thousand. The room was full. The audience put on 3-D glasses that had been handed out at the door—black plastic frames, somewhat reminiscent of Ray-Ban Wayfarers—and the lights went down.

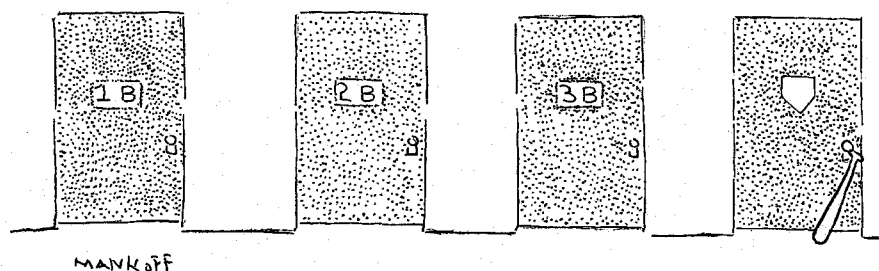
Jake's avatar—wasp-waisted, nine feet tall, blue—walked through a dusky forest thick with purple, green, pink, and cyan plants that pushed past the boundary of the screen and gently grazed the air, like plastic foliage poking out from a busted terrarium. Night fell, and a pride of slinking, starved, oil-black beasts attacked; he parried and lunged with a torch before

Neytiri appeared, a skimpy feather neck-piece, like a primitive bikini, draped across her chest. She killed the beasts in a series of gravity-defying martial-arts moves, then ran away. He gave chase through a forest now aglow with stands of pink man-o'-war-like plants, and over lichen that lit up spearmint green under his feet. As she was just about to disappear again, a cloud of milky spores surrounded him, alighting delicately on his shoulders, head, and hands, and dangling like dust motes in midair. When Neytiri spoke in Na'vi, subtitles appeared, layered unobtrusively in the 3-D space.

For an action sequence, it was subtle, romantic, trippy—like a slightly cartoonish version of a David Attenborough documentary. (The host of a later panel suggested to Cameron that “Avatar,” with its phosphorescent, psychedelic look, might make for good “Stonervision.”) The audience streamed out into the sunlight seeming pleasantly dazed. “The chick was in front of the subtitles,” one kid, in big sneakers and skinny jeans, said to his friend. “Yeah,” the friend said. “That was really rad.”

The camera that Cameron and Pace developed allows a director to more finely control the aesthetics of the stereo-space, and, to a great extent, the expectations of the 3-D industry ride on “Avatar.” “When you look at the history of film, there have been to date two great revolutions—sound and color,” Jeffrey Katzenberg, the head of Dreamworks Animation and a tireless promoter of 3-D, told me. “This will be the third great revolution. People are still somewhat skeptical and wonder if it’s a gimmick and if it is better suited to cartoons. I don’t believe that for a second. I think the day after Jim Cameron’s movie comes out, it’s a new world.” Michael Lewis, the C.E.O. of RealD, the leading 3-D projection company, says, “The industry is looking for its ‘Citizen Kane,’ its definitive work of 3-D, and ‘Avatar’ may be that film.”

“Citizen Kane” was rejected by audiences of its day; a month after Comic-Con, it seemed to be an unfortunately apt analogy. In what Cameron called a “social-marketing experiment,” Fox had declared August 21st “Avatar” Day, and showed sixteen minutes of the movie free in 3-D theatres around the world. It also released a trailer on Apple.com, which some four million people watched—more



than twice as many viewings as a trailer on the site had ever had. The citizen critics were not, in large part, kind. Dances with Wolves in Space, they said. Smurf-porn. Pocahontas meets Halo. Some drew unflattering comparisons to Thundercats, and made reference to Jar Jar Binks, the most hated of all digital characters. (Notably, members of the print media, who got it so wrong on “Titanic,” mostly held their fire.) The message boards on Ain’t It Cool News, a fanboy site that started tracking “Avatar” a decade ago, logged bitter disappointment. The fans there had anticipated “eyeball rape.” One wrote, “My eyeballs were merely fondled without permission.”

September: Cameron sat in his chair twelve hours a day, looking at effects shots—exhausted, exhilarated, the target now in his sights. “We counted, and there are fifteen shots that are *not* effects shots,” he said. “Then we see Sam has a pimple and—whoops—that’s an effects shot, too.” One day, he left Malibu in his favorite blue button-down and drove his everyday car, a silver Toyota Highlander hybrid, to Fox to listen to some new spots of dialogue that had been added to the film, and to hear a live orchestra perform the music that James Horner had composed for it.

He entered the control booth. Behind a glass partition a hundred and five musicians played along to the movie’s opening images, projected on a large screen: a first-person flying rush over misty, lush Pandora, Jake’s eye opening (*dubdubdubdub*), an architectural, Erector-set-like spaceship (woodwinds!), images of planets accompanied by a high sweet trumpet. Cameron nodded along.

At the end of the cue, Horner, who scored “Aliens” and won two Oscars for the music in “Titanic,” came into the control booth. “How did we do?” he asked Cameron anxiously. He felt nervous even

being there, with just a month to go and forty minutes of music left to write.

“Great,” Cameron said. He was very pleased. The music, to his mind, would help correct misconceptions about “Avatar.” This was a movie with a heart, a movie for women who like romance as much as for adolescent boys. “Too much is being said about the technology of this film. Quite frankly, I don’t give a rat’s ass how a film is made. It’s an *emotional* story. It’s a *love* story. They’re not expecting that. The sci-fi/fantasy fans see the trailer and they think, Cool—battles, robots. What you really need to get to is, Oh, it’s *that*, too.”

A music editor was asked to walk Cameron to the mixing stage, in the next building over. As he started to lead Cameron from the control room, Cameron said, wryly, “It’s pretty hard for a wreck diver to get lost.” He turned into a hallway, rapped his knuckles on a big harp case—“*There’s a landmark*”—and charged off down the hall, past the exit, into the mazy, dark interior. It was a moment before he sensed he was alone. “Whoops,” he said, and turned back, to where the editor was waiting patiently.

Cameron is in his element in post—fine-tuning, needling, nitpicking, expounding, and finally convinced that the movie will come out. When he arrived at the mixing stage, the engineers cued up a scene: Jake’s avatar squaring off against a big, rhinolike creature with the facial structure of a hammerhead shark. “You bitch,” Jake said, quoting Ripley.

“What he’d probably say is ‘You punk-ass bitch,’” Cameron said. “But that probably won’t fit. That’s what I’d be yelling. ‘Get back here! I’m not done with you!’ Right up till the moment it killed me.” ♦

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A live chat with Dana Goodyear.

LETTER FROM LISHUI

CHINESE BARBIZON

Painting the outside world.

BY PETER HESSLER

REDUX

Chen Meizi and Hu Jianhui at their gallery, which specializes in art for the foreign market. Scenes of Venice and Dutch towns, wk



In the countryside southwest of the city of Lishui, where the Da River crosses a sixth-century stone weir, the local government announced, four years ago, that it was founding a Chinese version of the Barbizon. The original French Barbizon School developed during the first half of the nineteenth century, in response to the Romantic movement, among painters working at the edge of the Fontainebleau Forest. Back then, the French artists celebrated rural scenes and peasant subjects. This wasn't exactly the mood in Lishui: like most cities in eastern China's Zhejiang Province, the place was focussed on urban growth; there was a new factory district, and the export economy was then booming. But the local Communist Party cadres wanted the city to become even more outward-looking, and they liked the foreign cachet of the Barbizon. They also figured that it would be good business: art doesn't require much raw material, and it's popular overseas. They referred to their project as Lishui's *Babison*, and they gave it the official name of the Ancient Weir Art Village. One Party slogan described it as "A Village of Art, a Capital of Romance, a Place for Idleness."

In order to attract artists, the government offered free rent in some old riverside buildings for the first year, with additional subsidies to follow. Painters arrived immediately; soon, the village had nearly a dozen private galleries. Most people came from China's far south, where there was already a flourishing industry of art for the foreign market. Buyers wanted cheap oil paintings, many of which were destined for tourist shops, restaurants, and hotels in distant countries. For some reason, the majority of artists who settled Lishui's Barbizon specialized in cityscapes of Venice. The manager of Hongye, the largest of the new galleries, told me that it had a staff of thirty painters, and that its main customer was a European-based importer with an insatiable appetite for Venetian scenes. Every month, he wanted a thousand Chinese paintings of the Italian city.

Another small gallery, Bomia, had been opened by a woman named Chen Meizi and her boyfriend, Hu Jianhui. The first time I met Chen, she had just finished a scene of Venice, and now she was painting a Dutch street scene from

Chen refers to as "Water City" and "Holland Street," are popular. Photograph by Mark Leong.

what looked like the eighteenth century. A Russian customer had sent a postcard and asked her to copy it. The painting was twenty inches by twenty-four, and Chen told me that she would sell it for about twenty-five dollars. Like most people in the Ancient Weir Art Village, she described Venice as Shui Cheng, "Water City," and referred to Dutch scenes as Helan Jie, "Holland Street." She said that over the past half year she had painted this particular Holland Street as many as thirty times. "All the pictures have that big tower in it," she said.

I told her that it was a church—the steeple rose in the distance, at the end of a road bordered by brick houses with red tile roofs.

"I thought it might be a church, but I wasn't sure," she said. "I knew it was important because whenever I make a mistake they send it back."

Through trial and error, she had learned to recognize some of the landmark buildings of Europe. She had no idea of the names of St. Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace, but she knew

these places mattered, because even the tiniest mistake resulted in rejection. She worked faster on less iconic scenes, because customers didn't notice slight errors. On the average, she could finish a painting in under two days.

Chen was in her early twenties, and she had grown up on a farm near Lishui; as a teen-ager, she learned to paint at an art school. She still had a peasant's directness—she spoke in a raspy voice and laughed at many of my questions. I asked her which of her pictures she liked the most, and she said, "I don't like any of them." She didn't have a favorite painter; there wasn't any particular artistic period that had influenced her. "That kind of art has no connection at all with what we do," she said. The Barbizon concept didn't impress her much. The government had commissioned some European-style paintings of local scenery, but Chen had no use for any of it. Like many young Chinese from the countryside, she had already had her fill of bucolic surroundings. She stayed in the Ancient Weir Art Village strictly because of the free rent, and she missed the

busy city of Guangzhou, where she had previously lived. In the meantime, she looked the part of an urban convert. She had long curly hair; she dressed in striking colors; she seemed to wear high heels whenever she was awake. On workdays, she tottered on stilettos in front of her easel, painting gondolas and churches.

Hu Jianhui, Chen's boyfriend, was a soft-spoken man with glasses and a faint crooked mustache that crossed his lip like a calligrapher's slip. Once a month, he rolled up all their finished paintings and took a train down to Guangzhou, where there was a big art market. That was how they encountered customers; none of the buyers ever came to the Ancient Weir Art Village. For the most part, foreigners wanted Holland Streets and the Water City, but occasionally they sent photographs of other scenes to be converted into art. Hu kept a sample book in which a customer could pick out a picture, give an ID number, and order a full-size oil painting on canvas. HF-3127 was the Eiffel Tower. HF-3087 was a clipper ship on stormy seas. HF-3199 was a circle of Native Americans smoking a peace pipe. Chen and Hu could rarely identify the foreign scenes that they painted, but they had acquired some ideas about national art tastes from their commissions.

"Americans prefer brighter pictures," Hu told me. "They like scenes to be lighter. Russians like bright colors, too. Koreans like them to be more subdued, and Germans like things that are grayer. The French are like that, too."

Chen flipped to HF-3075: a snow-covered house with glowing lights. "Chinese people like this kind of picture," she said. "Ugly! And they like this one." HF-3068: palm trees on a beach. "It's stupid, something a child would like. Chinese people have no taste. French people have the best taste, followed by Russians, and then the other Europeans." I asked her how Americans stacked up. "Americans are after that," she said. "We'll do a painting and the European customer won't buy it, and then we'll show it to a Chinese person, and he'll say, 'Great!'"

Lishui is a third-tier Chinese factory town, with a central population of around two hundred and fifty thousand, and, in a place like that, the outside world is both everywhere and nowhere

ATTACK OF THE 65-INCH WOMAN



at all. In the new development zone, assembly lines produce goods for export, but there isn't much direct foreign investment. There aren't any Nike factories, or Intel plants, or signs that say DuPont; important brands base themselves in bigger cities. Lishui companies make pieces of things: zippers, copper wiring, electric-outlet covers. The products are so obscure that you can't tell much from the signs that hang outside factory gates: Jinchao Industry Co., Ltd.; Huadu Leather Base Cloth Co., Ltd. At the Lishui Sanxing Power Machinery Co., Ltd., the owners have posted their sign in English, but they did so from right to left, the way Chinese traditionally do with characters:



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It's rare to see a foreign face in Lishui. Over a period of three years, I visited the city repeatedly, talking to people in the export industry, but I never met a foreign buyer. Products are sent elsewhere for final assembly, some passing through two or three levels of middlemen before they go abroad; there isn't any reason for a European or an American businessman to visit. But despite the absence of foreigners the city has been shaped almost entirely by globalization, and traces of the outside world can be seen everywhere. When Lishui's first gym opened, it was called the Scent of a Woman, for the Al Pacino movie. Once, I met a demolition-crew worker who had a homemade tattoo on his left arm that said "KENT." He told me he'd done it himself as a kid, after noticing that American movie gangsters have tattoos. I asked why he'd chosen that particular word, and he said, "It's from the cigarette brand in your country." Another time, I interviewed a young factory boss who wore a diamond earring in the shape of the letter "K." His girlfriend had an "O": whenever they were together, and the letters lined up, everything was all right.

The degree of detail often impressed me. The outside world might be distant, but it wasn't necessarily blurred; people caught discrete glimpses of things from overseas. In many cases, these images seemed slightly askew—they were focussed and refracted, like light bent around a corner. Probably it had something to do with all the specialization. Lishui residents learned to see the world in

parts, and these parts had a strange clarity, even when they weren't fully understood. One factory technician who had never formally studied English showed me a list of terms he had memorized:

Padomide Br. Yellow E-8GMX
Sellanyl Yellow N-5GL
Padocid Violet NWL
Sellan Bordeaux G-P
Padocid Turquoise Blue N-3GL
Padomide Rhodamine

In the labyrinth of the foreign language, he'd skipped all the usual entrances—the simple greetings, the basic vocabulary—to go straight to the single row of words that mattered to him. His specialty was dyeing nylon; he mixed chemicals and made colors. His name was Long Chunming, and his co-workers called him Xiao Long, or Little Long. He would consult his notebook and figure out the perfect mixture of chemicals necessary to make Sellanyl Yellow or Padocid Turquoise Blue.

He had grown up on a farm in Guizhou, one of the poorest provinces in China. His parents raised tea, tobacco, and vegetables, and Little Long, like both his siblings, left home after dropping out of middle school. It's a common path in China, where an estimated hundred and thirty million rural migrants have gone to the cities in search of work. In the factory town, Little Long had become relatively successful, earning a good wage of three hundred dollars a month. But he was determined

to further improve himself, and he studied self-help books with foreign themes. In his mind, this endeavor was completely separate from his work. He had no pretensions about what he did; as far as he was concerned, the skills he had gained were strictly and narrowly technical. "I'm not mature enough," he told me once, and he collected books that supposedly improved moral character. One was "The New Harvard MBA Comprehensive Volume of How to Conduct Yourself in Society." Another book was called "Be an Upright Person, Handle Situations Correctly, Become a Boss." In the introduction, the author describes the divides of the worker's environment: "For a person to live on earth, he has to face two worlds: the boundless world of the outside, and the world that exists inside a person."

Little Long had full lips and high cheekbones, and he was slightly vain, especially with regard to his hair, which was shoulder-length. At local beauty parlors, he had it dyed a shade of red so exotic it was best described in professional terms: Sellan Bordeaux. But he was intensely serious about his books. They followed a formula that's common in the self-help literature of Chinese factory towns: short, simple chapters that feature some famous foreigner and conclude with a moral. In a volume called "A Collection of the Classics," the section on effective use of leisure time gave the example of Charles Darwin. (The

book explained that Darwin's biology studies began as a hobby.) Another chapter told the story of how a waiter once became angry at John D. Rockefeller after the oil baron left a measly one-dollar tip. ("Because of such thinking, you're only a waiter," Rockefeller shot back, according to the Chinese book, which praised his thrift.)

Little Long particularly liked "A Collection of the Classics" because it introduced foreign religions. He was interested in Christianity, and when we talked about the subject he referred me to a chapter that featured a parable about Jesus. In this tale, a humble doorkeeper works at a church with a statue of the Crucifixion. Every day, the doorkeeper prays to be allowed to serve as a substitute, to ease the pain for the Son of God. To the man's surprise, Jesus finally speaks and accepts the offer, under one condition: If the doorkeeper ascends the Cross, he can't say a word.

The agreement is made, and soon a wealthy merchant comes to pray. He accidentally drops a money purse; the doorkeeper almost says something but remembers his promise. The next supplicant is a poor man. He prays fervently, opens his eyes, and sees the purse: overjoyed, he thanks Jesus. Again, the doorkeeper keeps silent. Then comes a young traveller preparing to embark on a long sea journey. While he is praying, the merchant returns and accuses the traveller of taking his purse. An argument ensues; the traveller fears he'll miss the boat. At last, the doorkeeper speaks out—with a few words, he resolves the dispute. The traveller heads off on his journey, and the merchant finds the poor man and retrieves his money.

But Jesus angrily calls the doorkeeper down from the Cross for breaking the promise. When the man protests ("I just told the truth!"), Jesus criticizes him:

What do you understand? That rich merchant isn't short of money, and he'll use that cash to hire prostitutes, whereas the poor man needs it. But the most wretched is the young traveller. If the merchant had delayed the traveller's departure, he would have saved his life, but right now his boat is sinking in the ocean.

When I flipped through Little Long's books, and looked at his chemical-color vocabulary lists, I sometimes felt a kind of vertigo. In Lishui, that was a common sensation; I couldn't imagine how people

created a coherent world view out of such strange and scattered contacts with the outside. But I was coming from the other direction, and the gaps impressed me more than the glimpses. For Little Long, the pieces themselves seemed to be enough; they didn't necessarily have to all fit together in perfect fashion. He told me that, after reading about Darwin's use of leisure time, he decided to stop complaining about being too busy with work, and now he felt calmer. John D. Rockefeller convinced Little Long that he should change cigarette brands. In the past, he smoked Profitable Crowd, a popular cigarette among middle-class men, but after reading about the American oil baron and the waiter he switched to a cheaper brand called Hibiscus. Hibiscuses were terrible smokes; they cost about a cent each, and the label immediately identified the bearer as a cheap-skate. But Little Long was determined to rise above such petty thinking, just like Rockefeller.

Jesus' lesson was easiest of all: Don't try to change the world. It was essentially Taoist, reinforcing the classical Chinese phrase *Wu wei er wu bu wei* ("By doing nothing everything will be done"). In Little Long's book, the parable of the Crucifixion concludes with a moral:

We often think about the best way to act, but reality and our desires are at odds, so we can't fulfill our intentions. We must believe that what we already have is best for us.

One month, the Bomia gallery received a commission to create paintings from photographs of a small American town. A middleman in southern China sent the pictures, and he requested a twenty-four-inch-by-twenty-inch oil reproduction of each photo. He emphasized that the quality had to be first-rate, because the scenes were destined for the foreign market. Other than that, he gave no details. Middlemen tended to be secretive about orders, as a way of protecting their profit.

When I visited later that month, Chen Meizi and Hu Jianhui had finished most of the commission. Chen was about to start work on one of the final snapshots: a big white barn with two silos. I asked her what she thought it was.

"A development zone," she said.

I told her that it was a farm. "So big just for a farm?" she said. "What are those for?"

I said that the silos were used for grain.

"Those big things are for grain?" she said, laughing. "I thought they were for storing chemicals!"

Now she studied the scene with new eyes. "I can't believe how big it is," she said. "Where's the rest of the village?"

I explained that American farmers usually live miles outside town.

"Where are their neighbors?" she asked.

"They're probably far away, too."

"Aren't they lonely?"

"It doesn't bother them," I said.

"That's how farming is in America."

I knew that if I hadn't been asking questions Chen probably wouldn't have thought twice about the scene. As far as she was concerned, it was pointless to speculate about things that she didn't need to know; she felt no need to develop a deeper connection with the outside. In that sense, she was different from Little Long. He was a searcher—in Lishui, I often met such individuals who hoped to go beyond their niche industry and learn something else about the world. But it was even more common to encounter pragmatists like Chen Meizi. She had her skill, and she did her work; it made no difference what she painted.

From my outsider's perspective, her niche was so specific and detailed that it made me curious. I often studied her paintings, trying to figure out where they came from, and the American commission struck me as particularly odd. Apart from the farm, most portraits featured what appeared to be a main street in a small town. There were pretty shop fronts and well-kept sidewalks; the place seemed prosperous. Of all the commissioned paintings, the most beautiful one featured a distinctive red brick building. It had a peaked roof, tall old-fashioned windows, and a white railed porch. An American flag hung from a pole, and a sign on the second story said "Miers Hospital 1904."

The building had an air of importance, but there weren't any other clues or details. On the wall of the Chinese gallery, the scene was completely flat: neither Chen nor I had any idea what she had just spent two days painting. I asked to see the original photograph, and I noticed that the sign should have read



"On the other hand, it's not the end of the world."

"Miners Hospital." Other finished paintings also had misspelled signs, because Chen and Hu didn't speak English. One shop called Overland had a sign that said "Fine Sheepskin and Leather Since 1973"; the artists had turned it into "Fine Sheepskim Leather Sine 1773." A "Bar" was now a "Dah." There was a "Hope Nuseum," a shop that sold "Amiques," and a "Residentlal Bboker." In a few cases, I preferred the new versions—who wouldn't want to drink at a place called Dah? But I helped the artists make corrections, and afterward everything looked perfect. I told Chen that she'd done an excellent job on the Miners Hospital, but she waved off my praise.

Once, not long after we met, I asked her how she first became interested in oil painting. "Because I was a terrible student," she said. "I had bad grades, and I couldn't get into high school. It's easier to get accepted to an art school than to a technical school, so that's what I did."

"Did you like to draw when you were little?"

"No."

"But you had natural talent, right?"
"Absolutely none at all!" she said, laughing. "When I started, I couldn't even hold a brush!"

"Did you study well?"

"No. I was the worst in the class."

"But did you enjoy it?"

"No. I didn't like it one bit."

Her responses were typical of migrants from the countryside, where there's a strong tradition of humility as well as pragmatism. In the factory town, people usually described themselves as ignorant and inept, even when they seemed quite skilled. That was another reason that Chen took so little interest in the scenes she painted: it wasn't her place to speculate, and she scoffed at anything that might seem pretentious. As part of the Barbizon project, the cadres had distributed a promotional DVD about Lishui, emphasizing the town's supposed links to world art. But Chen refused to watch the video. ("I'm sure it's stupid!") Instead, she hung the DVD on a nail beside her easel, and she used the shiny

side as a mirror while working. She held up the disk and compared her paintings to the originals; by seeing things backward, it was easier to spot mistakes. "They taught us how to do this in art school," she said.

Together with her boyfriend, Chen earned about a thousand dollars every month, which is excellent in a small city. To me, her story was amazing: I couldn't imagine coming from a poor Chinese farm, learning to paint, and finding success with scenes that were entirely foreign. But Chen took no particular pride in her accomplishment. These endeavors were so technical and specific that, at least for the workers involved, they essentially had no larger context. People who had grown up without any link to the outside world suddenly developed an extremely specialized role in the export economy; it was like taking their first view of another country through a microscope.

The Lishui experience seemed to contradict one of the supposed benefits of globalization: the notion that eco-

conomic exchanges naturally lead to greater understanding. But Lishui also contradicted the critics who believe that globalized links are disorienting and damaging to the workers at the far end of the chain. The more time I spent in the city, the more I was impressed with how comfortable people were with their jobs. They didn't worry about who consumed their products, and very little of their self-worth seemed to be tied up in these trades. There were no illusions of control—in a place like Lishui, which combined remoteness with the immediacy of world-market demands, people accepted an element of irrationality. If a job disappeared or an opportunity dried up, workers didn't waste time wondering why, and they moved on. Their humility helped, because they never perceived themselves as being the center of the world. When Chen Meizi had chosen her specialty, she didn't expect to find a job that matched her abilities; she expected to find new abilities that matched the available jobs. The fact that her vocation was completely removed from her

personality and her past was no more disorienting than the scenes she painted—if anything, it simplified things. She couldn't tell the difference between a foreign factory and a farm, but it didn't matter. The mirror's reflection allowed her to focus on details; she never lost herself in the larger scene.

Whenever I went to Lishui, I moved from one self-contained world to another, visiting the people I knew. I'd spend a couple of hours surrounded by paintings of Venice, then by manhole covers, then by cheap cotton gloves. Once, walking through a vacant lot, I saw a pile of bright-red high heels that had been dumped in the weeds. They must have been factory rejects; no shoes, just dozens of unattached heels. In the empty lot, the heels looked stubby and sad, like the detritus of some failed party. They made me think of hangovers and spilled ashtrays and conversations gone on too long.

The associations were different when you came from the outside. There were

many products I had never spent a minute thinking about, like pleather—synthetic leather—that in Lishui suddenly acquired a disproportionate significance. More than twenty big factories made the stuff; it was shipped in bulk to other parts of China, where it was fashioned into car seats, purses, and countless other goods. In the city, pleather was so ubiquitous that it had developed a distinct local lore. Workers believed that the product involved dangerous chemicals, and they thought it was bad for the liver. They said that a woman who planned to have children should not work on the assembly line.

These ideas were absolutely standard; even teen-agers fresh from the farm seemed to pick them up the moment they arrived in the city. But it was impossible to tell where the rumors came from. There weren't any warnings posted on factories, and I never saw a Lishui newspaper article about pleather; assembly-line workers rarely read the papers anyway. They didn't know people who had become ill, and they couldn't tell me whether there had been any scientific studies of the risks. They referred to the supposedly harmful chemical as *du*, a general term that means "poison." Nevertheless, these beliefs ran so deep that they shaped that particular industry. Virtually no young women worked on pleather assembly lines, and companies had to offer relatively high wages in order to attract anybody. At those plants, you saw many older men—the kind of people who can't get jobs at most Chinese factories.

The flow of information was a mystery to me. Few people had much formal education, and assembly-line workers rarely had time to use the Internet. They didn't follow the news; they had no interest in politics. They were the least patriotic people I ever met in China—they saw no connection between the affairs of state and their own lives. They accepted the fact that nobody else cared about them; in a small city like Lishui, there weren't any N.G.O.s or prominent organizations that served workers. They depended strictly on themselves, and their range of contacts seemed narrow, but somehow it wasn't a closed world. Ideas arrived from the outside, and people acted decisively on what seemed to be the vaguest rumor or the most trivial story.

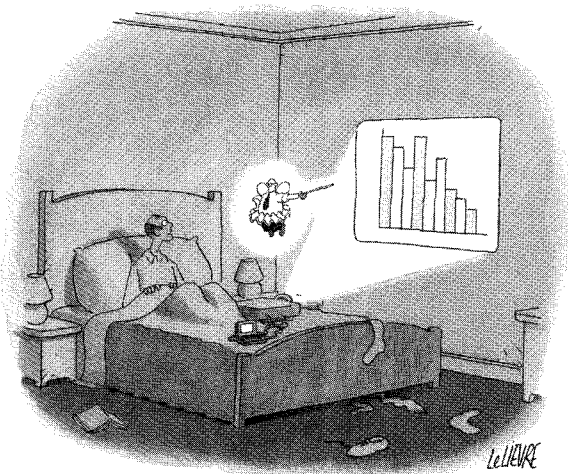


"One is a sham bag for my parents to confiscate."

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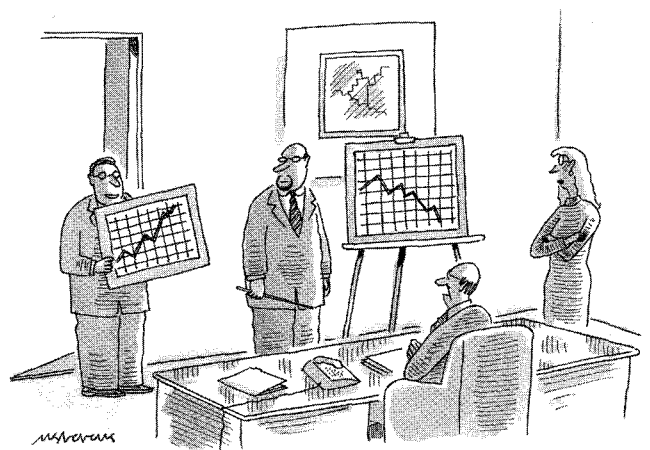
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GARDENING IN CARDOSO

Wildflowers become weeds
In this small triangular
Garfagnana garden
Where I uproot herb robert,
Spurge, wall-devouring
Valerian, garlicky
Ramsons, dead nettles.
What about oregano
No higher than dogs' piss,
And pennywort protecting
The lizard's hideaway?
I cut back the wild fig tree,
Its roots under the *casa*
Squeezing our water pipes,
Dozy snails its only fruit.
From acacia—beeless,
Unrelieved—a sexual
Heaviness marries me
And five old women—last
In the village to chant
The Whitsun rosary next
Door at San Rocco's shrine.
I leave them shepherd's purse's
Seedpods—little hearts—
Spoon-shaped petals on spikes.

—Michael Longley

That was key: information might be limited, but people were mobile, and they had confidence that their choices mattered. It gave them a kind of agency, although from a foreigner's perspective it contributed to the strangeness of the place. I was accustomed to the opposite—a world where people preferred to be stable, and where they felt most comfortable if they had large amounts of data at their disposal, as well as the luxury of time to make a decision.

In Lishui, people moved incredibly fast with regard to new opportunities. This quality lay at the heart of the city's relationship with the outside world: Lishui was home to a great number of pragmatists, and there were quite a few searchers as well, but everybody was an opportunist in the purest sense. The market taught them that—factory workers changed jobs frequently, and entrepreneurs could shift their product line at the drop of a hat. There was one outlying community called Shifan, where people seemed to find a different income

source every month. It was a new town; residents had been resettled there from Beishan, a village in the mountains where the government was building a new hydroelectric dam to help power the factories. In Shifan, there was no significant industry, but small-time jobs began to appear from the moment the place was founded. Generally, these tasks consisted of piecework commissioned by some factory in the city.

Once a month, I visited a family named the Wus, and virtually every time they introduced me to some new and obscure trade. For a while, they joined their neighbors in sewing colored beads onto the uppers of children's shoes; then there was a period during which they attached decorative strips to hair bands. After that, they assembled tiny light bulbs. For a six-week stretch, they made cotton gloves on a makeshift assembly line.

On one visit to Shifan, I discovered that the Wus' son, Wu Zengrong, and his friends had purchased five second-hand computers, set up a broadband

connection, and become professional players of a video game called World of Warcraft. It was one of the most popular online games in the world, with more than seven million subscribers. Players developed characters over time, accumulating skills, equipment, and treasure. Online markets had sprung up in which people could buy and sell virtual treasure, and some Chinese had started doing this as a full-time job; it had recently spread to Lishui. The practice is known as "gold farming."

Wu Zengrong hadn't had any prior interest in video games. He hardly ever went online; his family had never had an Internet connection before. He had been trained as a cook, and would take jobs in small restaurants that served nearby factory towns. Occasionally, he did low-level assembly-line work. But his brother-in-law, a cook in the city of Ningbo, learned about World of Warcraft, and he realized that the game paid better than standing over a wok. He called his buddies, and three of them quit their jobs, pooled their money, and set up shop in Shifan. Others joined them; they played around the clock in twelve-hour shifts. All of them had time off on Wednesdays. For World of Warcraft, that was a special day: the European servers closed for regular maintenance from 5 A.M. until 8 A.M., Paris time. Whenever I visited Shifan on a Wednesday, Wu Zengrong and his friends were smoking cigarettes and hanging out, enjoying their weekend as established by World of Warcraft.

They became deadly serious when they played. They had to worry about getting caught, because Blizzard Entertainment, which owns World of Warcraft, had decided that gold farming threatened the game's integrity. Blizzard monitored the community, shutting down any account whose play pattern showed signs of commercial activity. Wu Zengrong originally played the American version, but after getting caught a few times he jumped over to the German one. On a good day, he made the equivalent of about twenty-five dollars. If an account got shut down, he lost a nearly forty-dollar investment. He sold his points online to a middleman in Fujian Province.

One Saturday, I spent an afternoon watching Wu Zengrong play. He was a very skinny man with a nervous air; his

long, thin fingers flashed across the keyboard. Periodically, his wife, Lili, entered the room to watch. She wore a gold-colored ring on her right hand that had been made from a euro coin. That had become a fashion in southern Zhejiang, where shops specialized in melting down the coins and turning them into jewelry. It was another ingenious local industry: a way to get a ring that was both legitimately foreign and cheaply made in Zhejiang.

Wu Zengrong worked on two computers, jumping back and forth between three accounts. His characters travelled in places with names like Kalimdor, Tanaris, and Dreadmaul Rock; he fought Firegut Ogres and Sandfury Hideskinners. Periodically, a message flashed across the screen: "You loot 7 silver, 75 copper." Wu couldn't understand any of it; his ex-cook brother-in-law had taught him to play the game strictly by memorizing shapes and icons. At one point, Wu's character encountered piles of dead Sandfury Axe Throwers and Hideskinners, and he said to me, "There's another player around here. I bet he's Chinese, too. You can tell because he's killing everybody just to get the treasure."

After a while, we saw the other player, whose character was a dwarf. I typed in a message: "How are you doing?" Wu didn't want me to write in Chinese, for fear that administrators would spot him as a gold farmer.

Initially, there was no response; I tried again. At last, the dwarf spoke: "???"

I typed, "Where are you from?"

This time he wrote, "Sorry." From teaching English in China, I knew that's how all students respond to any question they can't answer. And that was it; the dwarf resumed his methodical slaughter in silence. "You see?" Wu said, laughing. "I told you he's Chinese!"

Two months later, when I visited Shifan again, three of the computers had been sold, and Wu was preparing to get rid of the others. He and his friends had decided that playing in Germany was no longer profitable enough; Blizzard kept shutting them down. Wu showed me the most recent e-mail message he had received from the company:

Greetings,

We are writing to inform you that we have, unfortunately, had to cancel your World

of Warcraft account. . . . It is with regret that we take this type of action, however, it is in the best interest of the World of Warcraft community as a whole.

The message appeared in four different languages, none of which was spoken by Wu Zengrong. It didn't matter: after spending his twenties bouncing from job to job in factory towns, and having his family relocated for a major dam project, he felt limited trauma at being expelled from the World of Warcraft community. The next time I saw him, he was applying for a passport. He had some relatives in Italy; he had heard that there was money to be made there. When I asked where he planned to go, he said, "Maybe Rome, or maybe the Water City." I stood with him in the passport-application line at the county government office, where I noticed that his papers said "Wu Zeng-xiong." He explained that a clerk had miswritten his given name on an earlier application, so now it was simpler to just use that title. He was becoming somebody else, on his way to a country he'd never seen, preparing to do something completely new. When I asked what kind of work he hoped to find and what the pay might be, he said, "How can I tell? I haven't been there yet." Next to us in line, a friend in his early twenties told me that he planned to go to Azerbaijan, where he had a relative who might help him do business. I asked the young man if Azerbaijan was an Islamic country, and he said, "I don't know. I haven't been there yet."

After I returned to the United States, I talked with a cousin who played World of Warcraft. He told me that he could usually recognize Chinese gold farmers from their virtual appearance, because they stood out as being extremely ill-equipped. If they gained valuable gear or weapons, they sold them immediately; their characters were essentially empty-handed. I liked that image—even online the Chinese travelled light. Around the same time, I did some research on pleather and learned that it's made with a solvent called dimethylformamide, or DMF. In the United States, studies have shown that people who work with DMF are at risk of liver damage. There's some evidence that female workers may have increased problems with stillbirths. In laboratory tests with rabbits, significant exposure to DMF has been proved to

cause developmental defects. In other words, virtually everything I had heard from the Lishui migrant workers, in the form of unsubstantiated rumor, turned out to be true.

It was another efficiency of the third-tier factory town. People manufactured tiny parts of things, and their knowledge was also fragmented and sparse. But they knew enough to be mobile and decisive, and their judgment was surprisingly good. An assembly-line worker sensed the risks of DMF; a painter learned to recognize the buildings that mattered; a nylon dyer could pick out Sellanyl Yellow. Even the misinformation was often useful—if Christ became more relevant as a Taoist sage, that was how He appeared. The workers knew what they needed to know.

After I moved back to the United States, I became curious about the small town that Chen Meizi and Hu Jianhui had spent so much time painting. At the Ancient Weir Art Village, I had photographed the artists in front of their work, and now I researched the misspelled signs. All of them seemed to come from Park City, Utah. I lived nearby, in southwestern Colorado, so I made the trip.

I was still in touch with many of the people I had known in Lishui. Occasionally, Chen sent an e-mail, and when I talked with her on the phone she said that she was still painting mostly the Water City. The economic downturn hadn't affected her too much; apparently, the market for Chinese-produced paintings of Venice is nearly recession-proof. Others hadn't been so lucky. During the second half of 2008, as demand for Chinese exports dropped, millions of factory workers lost their jobs. Little Long left his plant after the bosses slashed the technicians' salaries and laid off half the assembly-line staff.

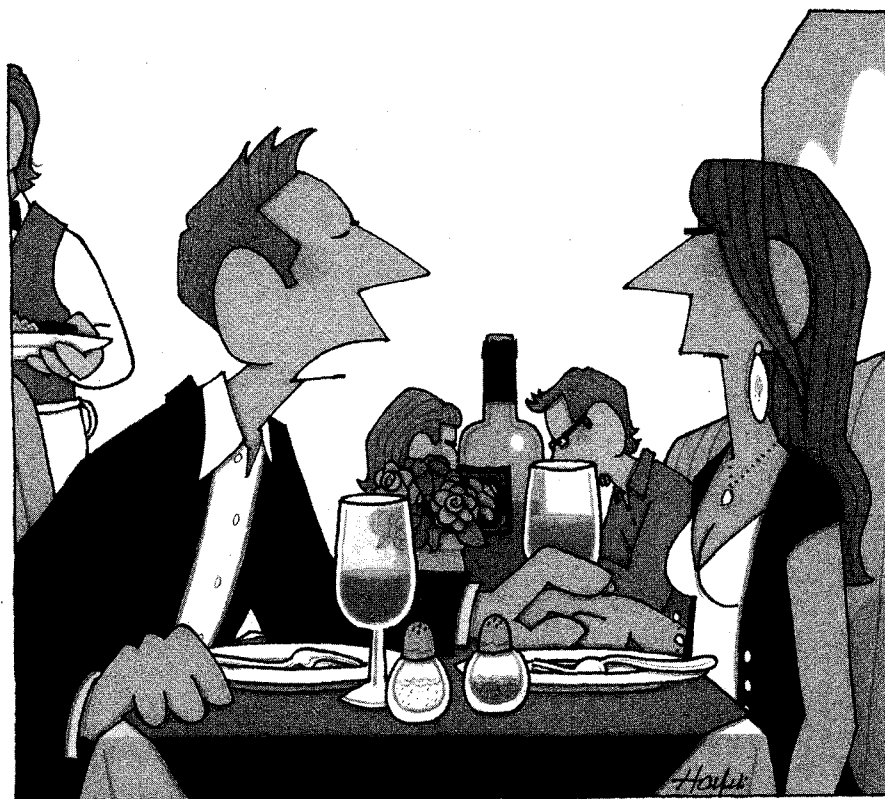
But most people I talked to in Lishui seemed to take these events in stride. They didn't have mortgages or stock portfolios, and they had long ago learned to be resourceful. They were accustomed to switching jobs—many laid-off workers simply went back to their home villages, to wait for better times. In any case, they had never had any reason to believe that the international economy was rational and predictable. If people suddenly

bought less pleather, that was no more strange than the fact that they had wanted the stuff in the first place. As 2009 progressed, the Chinese economy regained its strength, and workers made their way back onto the assembly lines.

In Park City, it was easy to find the places that the artists had painted. Most of the shops were situated on Main Street, and I talked with owners, showing them photos. Nobody had any idea where the commission had come from, and people responded in different ways when they saw that their shops were being painted by artists in an obscure Chinese city six thousand miles away. At Overland ("Fine Sheepskin Leather Since 1773"), the manager appeared nervous. "You'll have to contact our corporate headquarters," she said. "I can't comment on that." Another shop owner asked me if I thought that Mormon missionaries might be involved. One woman told a story about a suspicious Arab man who had visited local art galleries not long ago, offering to sell cut-rate portraits. Some people worried about competition. "That's just what we need," one artist said sarcastically, when she learned the price of the Chinese paintings. Others felt pity when they saw Chen Meizi, who, like many rural Chinese, didn't generally smile in photographs. One woman, gazing at a somber Chen next to her portrait of the Miners Hospital, said, "It's kind of sad."

Everybody had something to say about that particular picture. The building brought up countless memories; all at once, the painting lost its flatness. The hospital had been constructed to serve the silver miners who first settled Park City, and later it became the town library. In 1979, authorities moved the building across town to make way for a ski resort, and the community pitched in to transfer the books. "We formed a human chain and passed the books down," an older woman remembered. When I showed the painting to a restaurant manager, he smiled and said that a critical scene from "Dumb and Dumber" had been filmed inside the Miners Hospital. "You know the part where they go to that benefit dinner for the owls, and they're wearing those crazy suits, and the one guy has a cane and he whacks the other guy on the leg—you know what I'm talking about?"

I admitted that I did.



"You make me want to be a better person than you."

"They filmed that scene right inside that building!"

When I visited, the Park City mayor kept his office on the first floor of the Miners Hospital. His name was Dana Williams, and he was thrilled to see the photo of Chen Meizi with her work. "That's so cool!" he said. "I can't believe somebody in China painted our building! And she did such a great job!"

Like everybody else I talked to in Park City, Mayor Williams couldn't tell me why the building had been commissioned for a portrait overseas. It was a kind of symmetry between the Chinese Barbizon and Park City: the people who painted the scenes, and the people who actually lived within the frames, were equally mystified as to the purpose of this art.

Mayor Williams poured me a cup of green tea, and we chatted. He had an easy smile and a youthful air; he played guitar in a local rock band. "It's the yang to being mayor," he explained. He was interested in China, and he sprinkled his conversation with Chinese terms. "You mei you pijiu?" he said. "Do you have any beer?" He remembered that phrase from

a trip to Beijing in 2007, when he'd accompanied a local school group on an exchange. A scroll of calligraphy hung beside his desk; the characters read "Unity, Culture, Virtue." He told me that he had first thought about China back in the nineteen-sixties, after hearing Angela Davis lecture on Communism at U.C.L.A. There was a copy of "The Little Red Book" in his office library. When the Park City newspaper found out, it ran a story implying that the Mayor's decisions were influenced by Mao Zedong. Mayor Williams found that hilarious; he told me that he just picked out the useful parts of the book and ignored the bad stuff. "Serve the people," he said, when I asked what he had learned from Mao. "You have an obligation to serve the people. One of the reasons I'm here is from reading 'The Little Red Book' as a teen-ager. And being in government is about being in balance. I guess that has to do with the Tao." ♦

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Multimedia: the painters of Lishui.

FICTION

PROCEDURE IN PLAIN AIR

BY JONATHAN LETHEM



Later, after the men in jumpsuits had driven up and begun digging the hole, Stevick would remember that the guy on the bench beside him had been gazing puzzledly into the cone of his large coffee and had tried to interest him in the question of whether the café's brew aftertasted of soap or not. This day was gray, with heavy portents of rain. Not the best for sitting on the coffee shop's bench, but the interior of the café had become insufferable in all ways to Stevick: the shop's ambience and fancy name, its well-programmed iPod and fake-industrial chairs and tables and counters succeeding too completely, the room seething with overdressed-dishevelled types, nerve-rackedly Web surfing or doing the real-world equivalent with eye orbits through the room, every last one of whom made him feel mossy, corroded, replaced. Add to that the danger of running into his ex, Charlotte, and he never even glanced within in hope of a seat—he didn't want one. Just black, to go. He was an outdoor-bencher, he'd take his chances with the others here, backs to the shop's window, and if rain drove them off he'd have it to himself. Nor did he care to consider whether the coffee tasted of soap or not. He was getting his morning thrill on, his eyeopener, and this place, besides being on the right corner of the right block for him to stumble in, made a fine, joltingly strong concoction strictly from the addict's point of view. It could taste of lysergic acid or oysters, for all he cared. Maybe every cup of coffee he'd ever drunk had tasted of soap, so he couldn't discern soap from coffee—who knew?

Stevick, meant to be job hunting, wasn't. Too generous severance had blurred his motivation in the months when it would have mattered. Now, season slanting to Memorial Day, the flag of Manhattan's office life was at half-mast until September. So Stevick was propped like a morning crow on that bench when the truck arrived. His front-row seat recalled to him memories of childhood puppet shows, of gazing up at the slotted stage from which Punch and Judy and their like protruded. The soapy-coffee theorist was curled over some device, brow knit, thumbs-deep in a text-message campaign, making Stevick the only witness to the disembarkment of the truck's occupants.

They parked, apparently heedlessly, in the space in front of a hydrant, but without coming nearer than three feet to the curb. Cars slowed to pass. Stevick doubted that a garbage truck could have made it through. Surely a temporary placement, a compromise, then. The vehicle was an ungainly bolted-iron thing, resembling some reconfigured laundry or diaper truck, not massive like those used for transport of money, but solid enough in its way. Two men in jumpsuits popped out of the cab, and within a minute had orange traffic cones up to claim the territory that extended a few feet behind the truck, as well as between it and the curb. One contemplated the hydrant and then wryly topped it with a cone, which perched there like a dunce cap. It made an effective preemption of any indigenous neighborhood protest, an easy trump: the men in jumpsuits seemed to have some official function, even if their truck was unmarked.

The tools with which the two men dug the hole were notably quiet and efficient. After first marking a square of asphalt with yellow spray paint, using a band saw of daunting size and intensity they carved the blacktop along the lines of drying paint. At this point, Stevick's might still have been the only eyes attending. Perhaps these activities had drawn distracted, unsustained glances from a passing postal worker or nanny. Certainly nobody emerged into the chill morning from the café's interior, where those not obliviously earbudded were likely hunkered in routine annoyance against the saw's zip, much as they'd be for a passing siren or the clunk of a truck's axle in a pothole—nothing off the ordinary urban-decibel scale. The soap complainer had wandered away when Stevick wasn't looking.

The jackhammers, though, drew complaint. Several exasperated café denizens packed their laptops and muttered in the loose direction of the truck and its jumpsuited operatives as they fled the scene, like birds flitting to another treetop, and no more courageous. One of the café's counterpersons, a chubby guy in an apron, seeing business spooked, made a more forthright protest, even shaking his fist. But the small dimension of the task blunted his protest: by the time the jumpsuited pair had ignored the counterperson for a minute or two, minute smiles perhaps rippling

their lips—or was this an effect of the device's vibration?—they were shifting the jackhammer back into the truck, in favor of shovels and picks, with which they deftly cleared the hole of shattered black chunks. Stevick nodded consolation to the counterperson, who had, after all, poured his soapy coffee forty-five minutes before. What remained of it was cold.

The excavation was complete by the time Stevick wandered by half an hour later, having picked up his dry cleaning from the Korean and used his own bathroom before circling back to the café. Rain still threatened, hadn't arrived. Stevick couldn't say why he was enthralled by the activities that had commenced with the truck's arrival; some intimation, he supposed in retrospect, though it wasn't uncommon for him to buzz the café two or three times in a procrastinating morning. The hole was steep and accurate, hewing to the spray-painted plan still visible in two corners where the lines of paint, meeting, had pooled and blurred: an inverted phone booth of emptied dirt and rubble. Three fat fitted planks lay stacked beside the hole, sized to make a rough cover, Stevick guessed. The hole's former contents had been heaped precariously at the curb—the hydrant wasn't likely to be back in commission too soon, at this rate. The orange cone remained, like an ill-fitted condom stuck on its head. The truck, however, was gone.

And then it was back, jerking to a halt at the curb before him, as if responsive to Stevick's own presence, to his attentions; however absurd this notion might be, Stevick had conceived it. With an unhurried persistence, the jumpsuited men emerged again and opened the van's rear, then stepped inside to wrangle out what at first might have seemed another object but then revealed itself to be a man, a human captive. The man was dressed in the same uniform, as though recently demoted from their company. But his skin, Stevick noted wearily, as if this fact beckoned to outrage he ought to feel rising within him but didn't, was darker than theirs. His head shaved, where their hair was intact; his two-or-three-day beard rough, where theirs were, in one case, trimmed into a goatee and, in the other, shaved clean. So the jumpsuits, rather

than suggesting equivalence between the three, framed difference. A cruddy cloth gagged the captive's mouth; another bound his wrists in front of him. His eyes didn't trouble to plead as his captors led him to the fresh hole and lowered him within, taking care not to scuff his elbows on the crumbled lip. They'd measured well: the captive nestled just underneath the three fat boards when these were fitted over his head. One of the jump-suited operatives stood atop the boards, testing their firmness with apparent satisfaction, while the other quickly loaded the cones into the back of the truck. Now, at last, the rain began to fall.

"How—?" Stevick began, then faltered, unsure of his question. "How long are you going to leave him in there?"

The two could barely be bothered to hesitate, in their hurry for the shelter of the truck's cab. "We're on installation and delivery," the clean-shaven one said as he assumed the driver's seat. "Pick-up's another department."

"Are we talking hours or days or weeks?" Stevick said, locating, perhaps belatedly, some faint civic courage, a notion that he'd absorbed certain duties as a local witness to the open-air procedure, perhaps by default, but no less legitimately for that. Besides, others inside the café might be watching through the window. His question was perhaps a feeble one, but, for anyone observing, the fact that he'd stood up from the bench and begun some sort of stalling interrogation could be seen as crucial, either in a deeper intervention to be conducted by more effective or informed members of the community or in some later accounting of Stevick's comportment and behavior.

"I really didn't look at the schedule in this case," the driver said. "But they're rarely installed for more than three or four days in a single location."

"Anything longer wouldn't be seen as humane, I suppose?"

"More like these measures simply aren't effective beyond a certain point. Listen, we've got to go."

"Those boards are in no way tight enough to keep the rain from falling on him," Stevick pointed out. By placing their hole so near the hydrant, they'd prevented a parked car from giving shelter to the hole. On the other hand, perhaps they'd spared the hole's inhabitant something terrifying in being doubly pinned

by the low ceiling of a vehicle's undercarriage. Probably Stevick was guilty of overthinking: it was impossible to find a parking space in this neighborhood, so they'd settled on the obvious solution.

"That's generous of you to notice, citizen," the driver said. He gestured to the occupant of the passenger seat, the goateed man, who'd been sitting with his arms crossed and rolling his eyes, miming impatience. Now this silent partner produced something from the floor of the truck's cab: a compact black umbrella—the inexpensive double-hinged kind you might purchase at a shoe-repair shop, having ducked in during a gale. He handed it to the driver, who passed it through the open window to Stevick. "This is why we're grateful you came along when you did," the driver said, nodding to indicate the hole. "Don't be afraid to stand on top—it'll easily support your weight."

With that they were gone, and for the last time. Stevick never saw them again; the driver hadn't been misleading him when he alluded to the narrow specialization of their tasks. Now there was only the hole, its occupant, and Stevick, with his own duties. For, when freed by the truck's departure he turned to face the café, no one in fact was regarding him from the window, now streaked with rain and curtained by a dripping overhang. Stevick opened the umbrella. The hole was silent. Stevick could easily have gone home, but instead he stepped over, tested the soundness of the footing on top—there was little doubt, he'd watched them work—and sheltered both himself and the sturdy boards from the rain as well as he could beneath the feeble rigging of black cloth and wire.

In a lull the aproned counterman stepped outside the café's doors for a cigarette break. He nodded curtly at Stevick, exhaled smoke rising into the rain. "So you're in charge now, huh?" he said.

"I didn't want to leave him completely alone." There had been no sound, barely

a detectable motion from the hole beneath his feet, where the captive now sat braced, knees wedged in dirt. "I wouldn't say I'm in charge in any wider sense," Stevick continued. "I'm something of a stop-gap or placeholder, really."

"I more than understand," the café employee said. "We're in a similar situation. Just a gig between real jobs, that's what I keep telling myself." He tossed his fuming butt into the gutter, quite near. "There's a million stories like yours and mine."

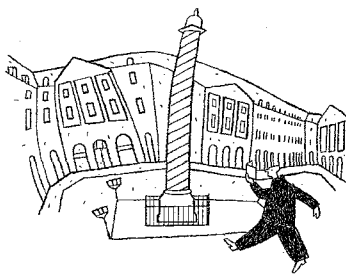
"That's not what I was getting at," Stevick began, but, uninterested, the counterman had returned inside. The café's population had never completely recovered from the jackhammer exodus; that, combined with the rain, kept Stevick's vigil a lonely one. He preferred it, actually. The usual early-afternoon dog-walkers passed by, hunched in tented plastic ponchos, their smaller dogs, the terriers and dachshunds, sheathed in sleeveless plaid coats, but Stevick had always regarded the walkers as ships on a distant sea, some passing flotilla. Even on days of bright sunshine, they were too occupied with canine herding and the management of plastic-bagged turds to engage in the human life of the street. Though few other humans acknowledged him, Stevick liked to believe that he was still a participant in this mainstream. Whether his relation to the man beneath the boards qualified as a human transaction was another question.

Toward evening, the rain tailed, though not enough so that Stevick lowered the umbrella. The café's clientele turned over; the tables were set for dinner, decorated with lit candles, menus in place; the staff even switched off the WiFi, in order to chase out the most tenacious of the afternoon Googlers. Others of Stevick's neighbors, the professionally dressed, beleaguered rush-hour subways, slavers in financial offices, trudged past the corner with their own umbrellas. Though Stevick always thought of them as upright sheep, some were surprisingly bold in their muttering.

"What did you say?" Stevick shouted back.

"You heard me, friend. You're lowering property values for the rest of us."

"Not in my back yard, eh?" Stevick said. "Boy, when something like this arrives in your midst you learn pretty fast



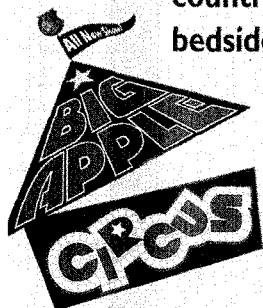
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"Does this poison smell weird to you?"

who's who in this neighborhood, you yuppie." Stevick spoiled for a fight, feeling now all the insurgent defiance he ought to have summoned for the diggers of the hole. But what was done was done. Defense of what should never have been in the first place had become Stevick's province.

"You artists need to grow up and learn the difference between an installation piece and a hole in the ground," the man sneered. Surely Stevick's age or younger, yet dressed like Stevick's grandfather, he added, "Slack-ass."

Stevick was incensed. "There's a man in this hole!"

"Don't bore me with your disgusting personal situation!"

"It's not a personal situation, you fucker!"

"Roll up and die, grubbie!"

"Yaaaaaarr!" They charged with umbrellas outheld, Stevick feeling he'd abandoned his station but unable to stem the urge to gore the man on the sidewalk and see him plead for mercy in the rain. Yet the two men essentially missed, failed to engage, the broad opened umbrellas merely grazing in a rubbery wet shudder as they passed. The single thrust having apparently exhausted his neighbor as much as it did Stevick, the man regathered his briefcase tightly beneath his

elbow. "I need to go pay the nanny," he murmured as he slunk off. Stevick retreated to his task.

It was night, and inside the café the menus at several of the tables had been taken up, wine poured, little plates delivered by the time another specialist made contact with Stevick. He wasn't, as Stevick might have hoped, a sentry arriving to relieve Stevick of a duty that, now that he contemplated it, he had to admit was self-assigned. Rather, the jumpsuited man, a sturdy, almost fat one this time, with heavy, black-rimmed eyeglasses and a Yankees cap shielding him from the rain, appeared to be some kind of inspector, charged with insuring the rightness of the site and recording in cryptic shorthand, with a ballpoint pen on a clipboarded sheet, certain impressions. The man double-parked his car, the blinking hazard lights of which gave clear evidence of the passing nature of his visit, and suggested to Stevick a long itinerary of random checks still ahead of him. He then politely asked Stevick for assistance in drawing aside the cover of planks. Stevick, in turn, extended the umbrella to help protect the operative's clipboard while he wrote.

The captive, Stevick noted with relief, didn't appear any more—or less—uncomfortable than when he'd first been

lowered into his hole. He stood, as if to acknowledge the inspector's attentions, but didn't glance upward, possibly not wishing to incur rebuke, or perhaps he had merely grown incurious about what were, for him, routine operations. When the inspector went back to his car and returned bearing a wax-paper cup with a straw and a pair of plastic-wrapped sandwiches, Stevick understood that he intended to feed the man in the hole, and saw also that the captive had at some point spat the dirty cloth from his mouth, so that it now encircled his throat like a necklace. Probably it had never been secure to begin with, and the captive had not wished to embarrass the men who'd dug the hole by flaunting their ineffectual knotting skills. The inspector lowered both the cup with the straw and half a sandwich to within range of the captive's mouth, and the man in the hole quietly and efficiently fed and drank. Stevick considered the fact that the captive could have cried out at any point and had chosen not to. Perhaps he'd learned that it led only to more punishment, if punishment was the right word. Stevick had begun to realize that he ascribed a certain strength, a gravity and authenticity, to the man in the hole, or perhaps to the hole itself, with which he wished to be associated, as in the sense of a shared undertaking. The passerby with whom he'd crossed umbrellas had been, in a manner, right: this was a kind of personal situation.

Stevick helped the inspector replace the wooden planks over the hole, then gratefully accepted the gift of the second wrapped sandwich, which turned out to contain pleasantly peppery chicken salad, albeit on soggy white bread. Stevick had been hungrier than he realized. Before departing, the inspector went back to his car one last time, returning now with an olive-green duffel, which he chucked gently to the edge of the hole, just beside Stevick.

"What's that?"

"Standard issue," the inspector explained obscurely. "It'll be there when you need it." He offered Stevick a quick salute and was off.

It was only after the café had closed for the night, the chairs overturned on the tables, that the rain ceased completely, leaving Stevick with the question of whether his shift here ought to

conclude. He shook out and shuttered the umbrella, and had just reached for the enigmatic duffel when he was greeted by the sound of his own name in the familiar voice of his ex, Charlotte. It was perhaps inevitable that she'd pass by if he camped out here all day. In another lifetime, which was what even yesterday seemed to be after this present occurrence, he might have been guilty of doing exactly that. As it happened, he'd overlooked completely the possibility of her wandering past. Charlotte was dressed and scented for a night on the town, clacking in her heels toward the subway entrance, most likely to undertake her usual carousel of Stevick's former favorite bars in the company of his lately-out-of-touch friends.

"Well, now, look at you," she joshed. "Keeping busy, as usual."

Stevick guiltily withdrew his hand from the duffelbag and stood alert to indicate his vigilance, though now, rain cleared, umbrella folded, it was hardly evident what his duties were. He'd always had to straighten his posture in Charlotte's presence, her height and perfect carriage a kind of warning or rebuke to him, and now he found himself wishing that she'd step off the curb, down to his level. The three planks that covered the hole were too expertly flush to the asphalt to be any help to him.

"There's a man in this hole, Charlotte." It was the second time he'd tried to even the field by stating this absolute truth, almost as if he needed to hear it himself to believe it, though he'd been presiding there all day. He wanted acknowledgment of his effort, but first he had to establish the basic situation.

"Sure," Charlotte said. "I've heard of this sort of thing."

"I guess I'd heard of it, too, though it's different to have it right in front of you. Still, I guess it has to be somewhere."

"True enough," Charlotte said. "I just hadn't pictured you getting involved. But by your logic, I suppose, someone had to step forward."

Stevick couldn't really improve on this sentiment, so he let it stand.

"So, what's in the bag?" Nothing was lost on Charlotte, he had to give her that.

"More sandwiches, I suspect," Stevick said, surprising himself with the guess. Should they be called rations, or provisions? It depended on who was eating

them, he supposed. "They're not bad, if you like chicken salad. Take one, if you're hungry."

Charlotte had by this time poked inside the bag, assuming her usual privileges in regard to Stevick's boundaries, and pulled out a plastic-wrapped jumpsuit, identical, except for its virgin state, to those worn by the operatives, and by the captive below. There appeared to be four or five of these stacked within the small duffel.

"You're hired!" Charlotte exclaimed. "You've been promoted from a temp position to staff."

Stevick found himself pleasingly able to ignore her goading. In many ways, Charlotte, like much else, was receding from view. The new conditions made irony a luxury. Was he meant to hoard the jumpsuits for his own use or to recruit other operatives from the neighborhood? Or, for that matter, were they intended for future incarcerated? Stevick considered the possibility that he'd eventually be fitted for a hole himself. The beauty of the uniform was that it settled nothing.

"Do you want to see him?" he asked Charlotte, and immediately regretted a question that seemed inappropriate, even somewhat craven on his part. He knew only after he'd said it that he would never again let himself use the man in the hole as a token or a bargaining chip. He was a person!

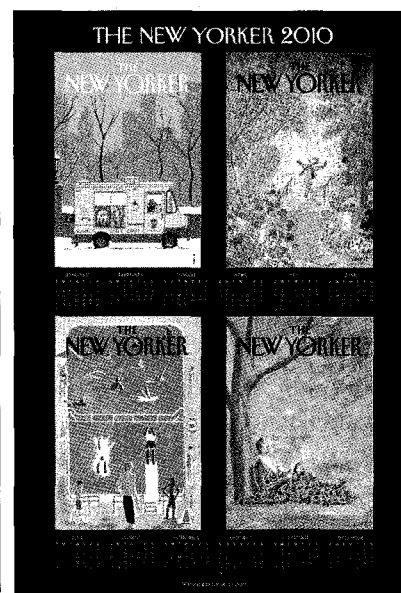
Charlotte's cavalier reply felt predestined. "No, thank you," she said. "I should go, I'm running late. But it's really good to see you doing so well, Stevick." Her voice was like a pat on a baby's downy skull.

The hint of tenderness cloaking Charlotte's dismissal disgusted Stevick. Talk about your passing connections! Stevick felt closer after a single day to the man in the hole, though they'd exchanged not a word. As he watched Charlotte make her way up the street, Stevick experienced only relief that she'd refused his suggestion. To pry up the planks when he had nothing to offer was a small indignity he had spared the captive below. The last thing Stevick wished to do, after all, was annoy him with inessentials. Success in an endeavor like this one lay in the details. Stevick was certain he was going to do a good job. ♦

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POP MUSIC

WRAPPING UP

A genre ages out.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

Weighing in early on what academics call “periodization” is a dicey proposition. If you try to locate the moment of a major paradigm shift, in the moment, perhaps by calling your album “Hip Hop Is Dead,” as Nas did in 2006, you’re slipping into weatherman territory. Will it rain tomorrow? Will another great rap album pop up? The life spans of genres and art forms are best perceived from the distance of ten or twenty years, if not more. With that in mind, I still suspect that Nas—along with a thousand bloggers—was not fretting needlessly.

If I had to pick a year for hip-hop’s demise, though, I would choose 2009, not 2006. Jay-Z’s new album, “The Blueprint 3,” and some self-released mixtapes by Freddie Gibbs are demonstrating, in almost opposite ways, that hip-hop is no longer the avant-garde, or even the time-keeper, for pop music. Hip-hop has relinquished the controls and splintered into a variety of forms. The top spot is not a particularly safe perch, and every vital genre eventually finds shelter lower down, with an organic audience, or moves horizontally into combination with other, sturdier forms. Disco, it turns out, is always a good default move.

Hip-hop, a spinoff from New York City’s early disco culture, has been a commercial proposition since the release of “Rapper’s Delight,” in 1979. That’s thirty years, a long time for any genre. If you want to be conservative and decide that mainstream cultural relevance kicked in toward the end of the eighties, with New York’s golden age and the quick follow-up

of gangsta rap, the wildly popular genre from Los Angeles, that still leaves twenty years of cultural impact. This may be a fine time for hip-hop to atomize. The original form has done an awful lot of work.

“The Blueprint 3” falls in line with other recent mass-market successes in hip-hop. Compare it to Kanye West’s “Glow in the Dark” tour, or Kid Cudi’s breakout hit “Day ‘n’ Nite,” and you will notice that this is hip-hop by virtue of rapping more than sound. The tempos and sonics of disco’s various children—techno, rave, whatever your particular neighborhood made of a four-on-the-floor thump—are slowly replacing hip-hop’s blues-based swing. It doesn’t matter if you’re talking about the rudimentary digital sound of New Orleans bounce or the crusty samples of New York hip-hop: this music wants to swing and syncopate. On major commercial releases, this impulse is giving way to a European pulse, simpler and faster and more explicitly designed for clubs.

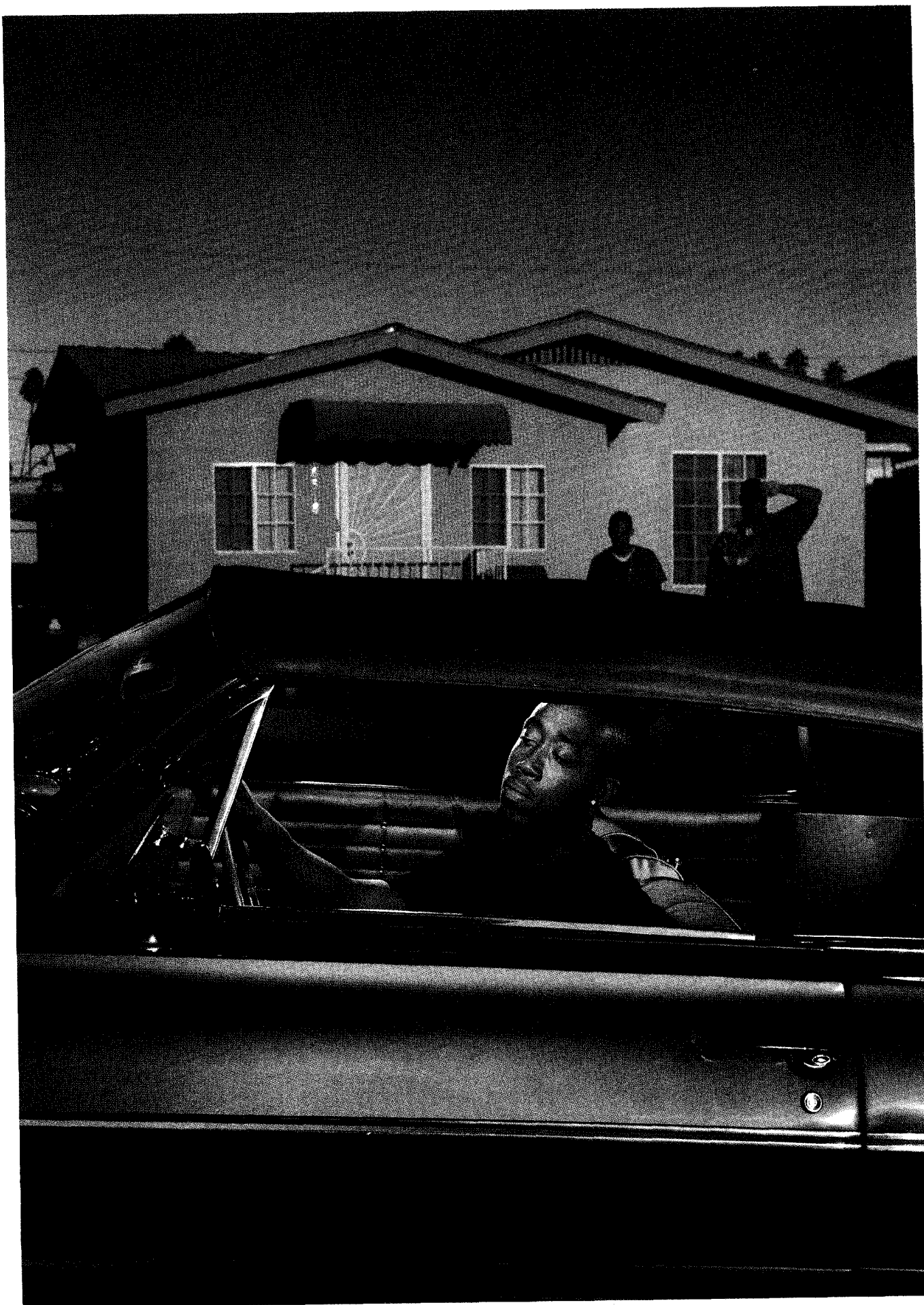
A mildly entertaining patchwork of styles, anchored by lots of guest singers and rappers, “The Blueprint 3” is only tenuously connected to Jay-Z’s best work, and a patient listener will have to accept that. Gone are the autumnal poise and the tightly nested meanings, verses delivered with the bravado of someone who knows he could go all night but will bow out early to appear deceptively human. The new Jay-Z is a relaxed impresario, a *Macher* with A-list friends making safe choices. On the single “D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune),” Jay-Z mentions rappers that he previously overshadowed, an acknowl-

edgment, perhaps, of a shift in hierarchy: “This shit need a verse from Jeezy, I might send this to the mixtape Weezy.” The latter is a reference to Lil Wayne, who publicly claimed the title of “greatest rapper alive,” while also stipulating that it used to belong to Jay-Z. Wayne was right, for a while, and then went weirdly silent, save for a few odd rock tracks. Wayne’s 2008 release, “Tha Carter III,” which included “A Milli,” a thick, psychedelic ramble tied to a thin, metronomic canter, was the year’s biggest-selling album—and probably the last moment when hip-hop was both popular and improbably weird.

“The Blueprint 3” features nothing as startling or vital as “A Milli.” (Jay-Z albums were once routinely loaded with three or four such songs.) The only tune that interrupted the summer flow of Michael Jackson songs in my Brooklyn neighborhood—not far from where Jay-Z grew up—was “D.O.A.,” a bit of a stylistic throwback, using a generous sample of an obscure 1970 rock record. It sounds more like vintage nineties Jay-Z, and it’s the only track in that mold. The rest of the album veers toward a pop median, giving synthesizers and R. & B. singers the last say. For “Run This Town,” that means Rihanna has to tackle a dreary and aimless melody that could be saved only by someone with a surplus of persona. (Mary J. Blige and Nina Simone come to mind.) On “Empire State of Mind,” Alicia Keys improves matters significantly, sending her voice high and strong: “Let’s hear it for New York!” Why not?

The album begins, though, with “What We Talkin’ About,” which sounds like a cover of a slow Italian disco number from the seventies with a particularly tuneless chorus. “Young Forever” is genuinely European, a flat-footed remake of “Forever Young” by the German synth-pop band Alphaville. “Off That,” Jay-Z’s duet with the young rapper of the moment, the genial and deft Drake, works over a brisk computerized bubble that doesn’t necessarily sound as if it needed any rapping. None of the beats here are subpar, and Jay-Z is too smart to be boring, but there are few verses you’ll walk around repeating (unlike “The Black Album,” from 2003, which read like an alternate Bartlett’s, all pith and punch lines), and the music simply confirms that Jay-Z knows what’s happening in pop,

ABOVE: MARISCAL



Freddie Gibbs rhymes the way he talks: quickly and cleanly, with little sentimentality or exaggeration. Photograph by Evan Hurd.

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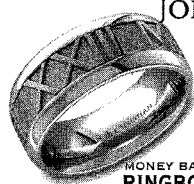
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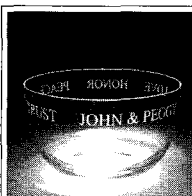
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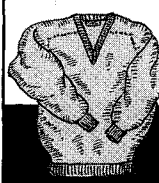
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not that he necessarily belongs there.

Other rappers will likely ride this new wave of club beats better than Jay-Z, but they have yet to emerge. It won't be Kid Cudi, whose singsongy mumble does nothing to save "Already Home," a sluggish number on "The Blueprint 3," and whose debut album, "Man on the Moon; The End of the Day," manages to be both distracted and ill-tempered.

As the marquee names nudge rap into its transitional, synthetic phase, a host of traditionalists are doing strong work in well-known older styles. This movement reminds me of metal and jazz, areas where artists work in a larger number of established subgenres that do small but consistent business with loyal audiences. The claim to shock is traded in favor of a reliable form and a reliable following.

Raekwon, one of the Wu-Tang Clan's core members, just released "Only Built 4 Cuban Linx . . . Pt. II," the follow-up to his 1995 debut, "Only Built 4 Cuban Linx . . ." It's a sequel few thought would come and fewer thought would be any good. (Imagine if "Chinese Democracy" had been as good as "Appetite for Destruction.") Raekwon has drifted between uninspired beats and retreads since the nineties. He seems to have found his voice by simply returning to where he started. "Cuban Linx II" sounds like an old Wu-Tang record: scraggly samples from soul records and rapid, gnomic bundles of rhymes about drug-selling and agitated encounters. Almost every skit involving Raekwon or his partner, Ghostface Killah, involves somebody yelling at somebody else. This is the Wu-Tang vision of living in the projects, "The Wire" before there was "The Wire." Whether or not it really represents life as Raekwon and his bandmates know it isn't relevant; this is the life that they know how to describe, and there's an urgency here that's entirely missing from the recent work of artists like Jay-Z and Kid Cudi.

Freddie Gibbs is the one rapper I would put money on right now. And, though it may be irrelevant to his gift, the criminal life that Raekwon raps about on "Cuban Linx II" is still very familiar to Gibbs. When I spoke to Gibbs on the phone, he told an unadorned story about growing up in Gary, Indiana. "We don't even have a movie theatre," he said. "We

don't even have a mall. I can't ride around Gary and get inspired—we don't have anything." Several years ago, Gibbs was selling drugs out of a friend's recording studio. He eventually decided he could rap better than the people coming in to record. His efforts found their way across the Web to Interscope Records, and Gibbs was signed. He moved to Los Angeles in 2005, and began to work at a relentless pace. "I was two hundred per cent into this rap thing," Gibbs said. "Four P.M. to 1 P.M. the next afternoon in the studio." When Joe Weinberger, the man who signed him, left Interscope, Gibbs was dropped.

Gibbs returned to Gary briefly, falling back into crime. Some friends encouraged him to return to California, and he did. He has now released five mixtapes onto the Internet, some using the material originally intended for Interscope. These are not quite like other hip-hop mixtapes circulating, where the standard practice is to record new material over other artists' well-known beats. They are closer to fully formed albums, especially the newest one, "Midwestgangstaboxframecadillacmuzik." The beats are almost all original and there is a minimum of filler. (Gibbs's take on this approach is also a short summation of the music industry's woes: "These rap motherfuckers giving you twenty-five songs with only five good ones—who is going spend their hard-earned money on that?") Gibbs rhymes the way he talks, quickly and cleanly, with little sentimentality or exaggeration. After years of bloated expansion and leveraging of fantasies, "gangsta rap" has largely become a meaningless term. Unvarnished reporting delivered with a panache that balanced the pain—this was gangsta rap's first achievement, not unlike the cry of mid-seventies reggae artists like Culture and Bob Marley. Somewhere along the way, the struggle to escape became a love of accumulation, and underdogs ended up sounding as smug as the authorities they once battled.

"I think rap is about to go back to the early nineties," Gibbs told me. "You could do whatever you wanted, and radio had to play it." Gibbs does not currently have a record deal, and he isn't looking for one. ♦

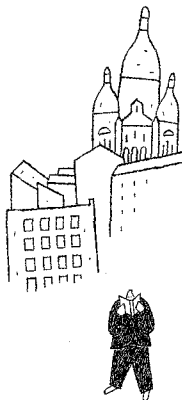
NEWYORKER.COM/VIDEO

Freddie Gibbs raps and talks about his music.

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Death of Conservatism, by Sam Tanenhaus (Random House; \$17). What's the matter with conservatives? They were damaged in the last elections, but, more important, Tanenhaus writes, "on the great issues of the day they are virtually silent." Silent doesn't mean quiet: conservatives shout a lot, but what they say signifies almost nothing in terms of the lives of ordinary Americans, to whom they have little to offer, "apart from a plea for their votes." The problem, essentially, is that, freedom fries notwithstanding, conservatives are too French—alternately Robespierrean and revanchist—looking to transform and undermine rather than to curate and build on tradition. In the "genuine Burkean" sense, they are not conservative at all, and the "modern era's two true conservative presidents" were Eisenhower and Clinton. Tanenhaus's case is concise and persuasive. He cautions liberals not to celebrate the current situation: "America needs a serious, rigorous opposition," and at the moment it has nothing of the sort.

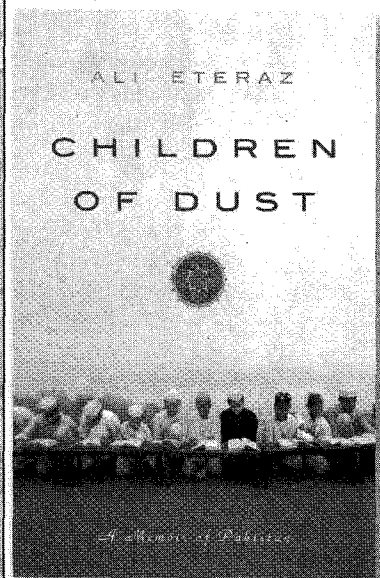
The Pattern in the Carpet, by Margaret Drabble (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; \$25). Drabble writes that she initially wanted to attempt a history of the jigsaw, from its aristocratic inception in wood, in the seventeen-sixties, to its cardboard popularization as, in her view, one of the most democratic and therapeutic pastimes. But, faced with age and her husband's illness, she turned the book into a form of occupational therapy, with reminiscences of her sometime puzzle partner Auntie Phyl, and abstruse nuggets of research—in 1644, Cardinal Mazarin commissioned playing cards to teach the five-year-old King Louis XIV the lay of his land. The anecdotes are punctuated with forthright pronouncements like "A Heap of confusion" is a good phrase." A good phrase, and here a fitting one. For Drabble fans, the book may supply missing pieces. For others, the impression is of details from several jigsaws tenuously joined.



The Children's Book, by A. S. Byatt (Knopf; \$26.95). Byatt's mammoth novel, spanning the two and a half decades before the First World War, centers on the Wellwood family, led by a banker with radical inclinations and his wife, the author of best-selling fairy tales. At their country estate, they preside over a motley brood of children and host midsummer parties for fellow-Fabians, exiled Russian anarchists, and German puppeteers. But the idyll contains dark secrets, as a potter whom the family takes in for a time discovers. Byatt is concerned with the complex, often sinister relationship between parent and child, which she explores through various works of art—pottery, puppet shows, fairy tales—using them to refract and illuminate the larger narrative. At times, an excess of detail threatens to overwhelm the plot: no aquamarine glaze goes undescribed, no psychological process unmentioned. But, despite risking tedium, the book is ultimately engaging and rewarding.

Cockroach, by Rawi Hage (Norton; \$23.95). The unnamed narrator of Hage's second novel is a suicidal Middle Eastern immigrant living in poverty in Montreal. He is also a kleptomaniac, and breaks into the houses of acquaintances to snoop through their lives, opening their fridges as well as (for us) their immigrant stories. The book is misanthropic and highly allusive—with the added but endearing tone of "Notes from Underground," and a clear nod to Kafka (during break-ins, the protagonist is transformed into the insect of the title). Hage's language can queasily bring the inanimate to life, as when Sunday dresses in a store are "suspended behind glass like condemned medieval witches." But there is a mordant hopelessness to the tale, as in a description of pay phones on street corners in the desolate city: "In the cold they stand like vertical, transparent coffins for people to recite their lives in."

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Night Journey



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LUCKY MAN

Horton Foote's three acts.

BY JOHN LAHR

In 1933, the worst year of the Depression, the sixteen-year-old Horton Foote left his home town, Wharton, Texas, to become an actor. He became a playwright instead, and during the long and prolific career that followed—he wrote more than sixty plays and thirteen screenplays, and won two Academy Awards (“To Kill a Mockingbird,” “Tender Mercies”) and a Pulitzer Prize (“The Young Man from Atlanta”)—Foote lived in Manhattan, Pasadena, Nyack, and New Hampshire. But, no matter how far he wandered from the pecan trees, sugarcane, cotton, and grass farms of Wharton’s rich alluvial flatland, he continued to live his imaginative life within the geography and the history of his home. For four decades, Foote’s mother, Hallie Brooks Foote, sent her son daily bulletins about the goings on in Wharton, which is sixty miles south of Houston, fifty miles from the Gulf. “I knew all the whites, at least by sight, and I knew many of the blacks by their given names,” Foote wrote, in his 1999 memoir, “Farewell,” of his home town, which, in his youth, had a population of about three thousand. At the end of a visit there in the early forties, Foote wrote to his future wife, Lillian Vallish, about his fascination with the place: “I hear the tales and get reports of the inner lives. I see them unmask themselves and I know that . . . that inner thing that seeks to destroy and flay people is at work here. But I have an impersonal feeling about it all that I’ve never had before.” Wharton was Foote’s omphalos and his literary inspiration: “my contained world, my garden, my Eden.”

Foote’s first one-act play, written at the suggestion of Agnes de Mille, was “Wharton Dance” (1940). His first full-length play, “Texas Town” (1941), revolved around the social life at Outlar’s drugstore, on Wharton’s main drag. Almost all Foote’s plays reimagine the socioeconomic and moral history of

Wharton (renamed Harrison); they also record the tribulations of his own fraught family line, as its members struggled to adapt from the old agrarian South to the new industrial South. “The Orphans’ Home Cycle,” a series of nine plays (eight of which were written between 1974 and 1977), tells the saga of Foote’s father’s journey from a miserable childhood—abandoned by his mother at age twelve—to a happy marriage. (A streamlined three-part version of the cycle was mounted, for the first time, in September, at Hartford Stage, and will open at the Signature Theatre Company’s Peter Norton Space, in New York, in November.) “If a poet knows more about a horse than he does about heaven, he might better stick to the horse,” Foote was fond of saying, quoting the father of his favorite American composer, Charles Ives. “Someday the horse might carry him to heaven.”

Foote, who died on March 4, 2009, just ten days short of his ninety-third birthday, was not a weathered, macho, West Texas cowboy or, as he put it, one of the “rich, greedy, vulgar cattlemen building impossible empires . . . on the vast plains.” He was a bookish, courtly East Texas gent, who could trace his ancestry back to Albert Clinton Horton, the first lieutenant governor of Texas (who sold off his Alabama plantation in order to settle there, in 1834). After his parents died, in the early seventies, Foote took up semipermanent residence in the old family home, on a half-acre plot, whose back yard, filled with ancient pecan trees, faced the back yard of what had been his grandparents’ house. Toward the end of his life, his favorite thing was to be driven on a forty-minute circuit around the environs that his plays had turned into myth. Foote’s car journey took him from his house—whose front porch “proudly” resembled Atticus Finch’s in the 1962 film “To Kill a Mockingbird”—to the town square,

alluded to in “The Man Who Climbed Pecan Trees” (1981); past the site of Outlar’s drugstore; then right onto Milam, where Foote’s father ran the struggling haberdashery that features in “Cousins” (1983) and “The Death of Papa” (1997); to Richmond Road, where Foote’s relatives inhabited the beautiful, sycamore-shaded homes that were the center of the drama in “Courtship” (1978) and “The Carpetbagger’s Children” (2001); then out of town, often on a route that led through Burr, Iago, Boling, New Gulf, Pledger, and on to East Columbia, where Foote’s great-grandparents’ house fell into the Brazos River, and where the smell of salt air and dirt, the scudding clouds blown in from the Gulf, the old houses and low horizons are recognizably the backdrop for “The Trip to Bountiful” (1953); then back into town, past the family cemetery, about half a mile from Foote’s house, where his great-grandparents, his grandparents, and his parents were buried. (Foote is now buried there, too.)

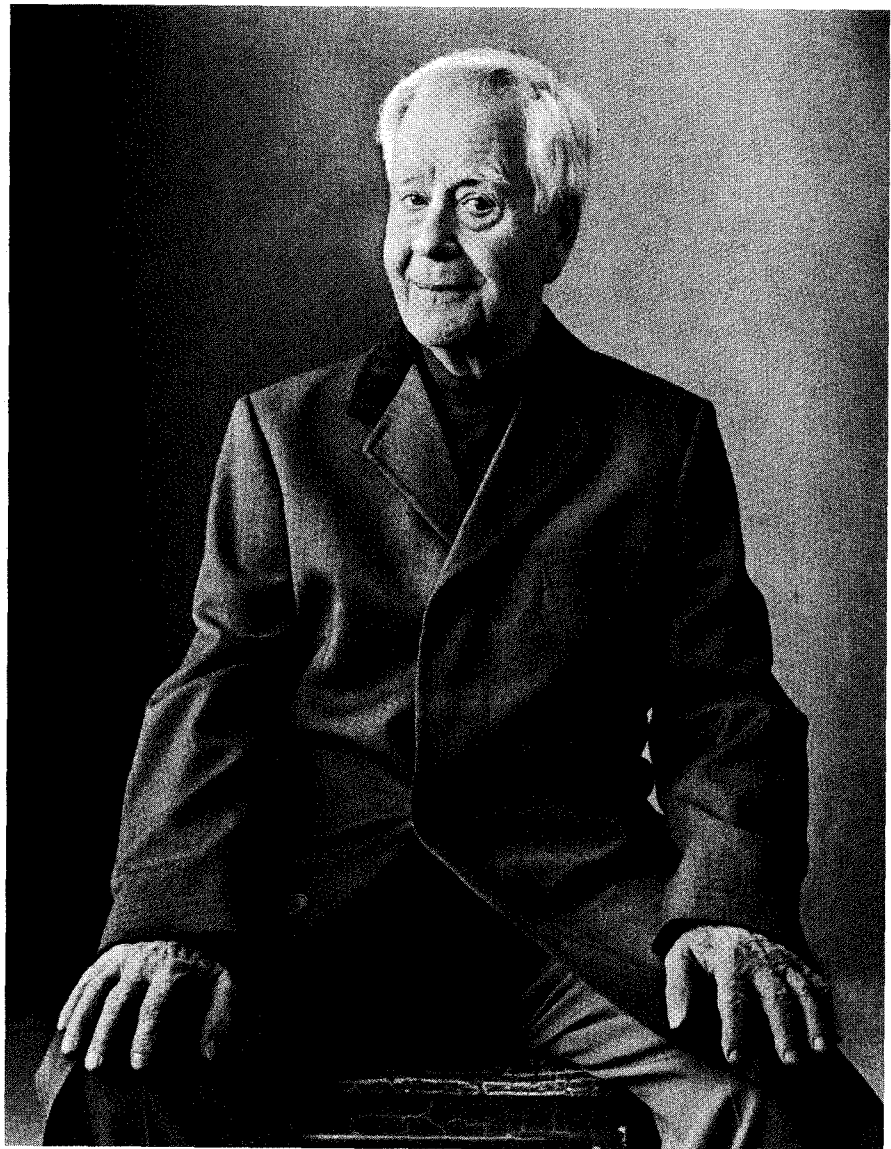
In this landscape, Foote found the hint of eternity that he expressed through one of his most famous characters, the aging, benighted Carrie Watts, in “The Trip to Bountiful,” who escapes the oppressive apartment of her son and his unpleasant wife in Houston and makes a long journey back to her rural home town: “Pretty soon it’ll all be gone, . . . this house . . . me . . . you,” she tells her son when she gets there. “But the river will be here. The fields. The woods. The smell of the Gulf. That’s what I always took my strength from. . . . We’re part of all this. We left it, but we can never lose what it has given us.”

“Change was an early acquaintance in my life,” Foote said. His work is both a witness to change in Texas—Reconstruction and its aftermath (“Convicts,” 1977), the influenza pandemic (“1918,” 1979), the collapse of the cotton economy (“The Death of Papa”), the exodus to the cities (“Bountiful”), the nineteen-eighties oil bust (“Dividing the Estate,” 1989)—and a meditation on his own survival. “He was haunted by the often inexplicable result of how a person’s life turned out,” his eldest daughter, the actress Hallie Foote, said. “Why his three uncles ended up as

they did"—Tom Brooks, an alcoholic merchant seaman, died in his forties; Speed Brooks, a drug addict, did time in San Quentin; Billy Brooks was beaten by his boozy wife—"and why others did not. He talked about being the last. He kind of marvelled at that."

"I listen a lot," Foote said, in his last recorded interview, given in January, at Hartford Stage. "If I ever teach writing again, I'd say the first lesson is to listen." As he portrayed himself, Foote was a snoop kid, with an "obsessive interest in the details of people." "When I was growing up, I spent half my time in the house listening," he wrote. As an eavesdropper, he was spared nothing. "I was never told to leave the room, no matter how gruesome or unhappy the tale. And so early on, I learned to accept the most tragic events as part of life," he said. "I heard in lurid detail of hurt feelings, suicide, jealousies, passions, and scoundrels of all kinds." (In "The Death of Papa," a character remarks of the ten-year-old Horace Robedaux, Jr., Foote's alter ego, "I've never known a more inquisitive child. We have to be careful how we talk around him, too. He hears everything.") Foote, born Albert Horton Foote, Jr., claimed that more than half his plays began as tales told to him by his father, Albert Horton Foote, Sr., who was known in the family as Big Horton. (Foote was dubbed Little Horton.)

Foote called himself a "theatre rat." At the age of twelve, before he'd ever seen a professional play, he dedicated himself to the stage. "I . . . just awakened one day with the sure knowledge that I wanted to be an actor," he wrote. There were no actors in Wharton; there were no actors in his long family line. Except for a troupe of travelling players who came to town once a year, Foote had never even met an actor. He read movie magazines and sent away for the autographs of silent-film stars. But Foote's obsession with acting had nothing to do with celebrity and everything to do with storytelling. In the South, where making conversation was both a valuable skill and a kind of blood sport, the successful storyteller was venerated. As the family's first son, first grandson, first nephew, and first great-nephew, whose maternal grandfather was the richest man in the county, Foote lived his youth at the center of an unusual



Foote, circa 1998. "Change was an early acquaintance in my life," he said.

amount of attention. (His mother and father had eloped—against her parents' wishes—and a year of silence followed, until Foote's birth reunited the generations.) For Foote, acting—with its gratifying thrill of being taken in by the admiring gaze of others—provided a simulacrum of his family's adoration. In "The Actor" (2002), his only strictly autobiographical play, Foote humorously dramatized his bewildered father's struggle to come to terms with his son's ambition:

HORACE: It's hard to describe, Daddy. It's just like something came to me and said, you want to be an actor.

HORACE, SR.: I never heard of such a thing. Did it say aloud, "You want to be an actor"?

HORACE: No, sir, not really, but I heard it.

HORACE, SR.: I understand you heard it, but was it a man's voice or a woman's voice?

Foote won his father over. Instead of investing in a profitable oil-well consortium, Big Horton sold off his only parcel of land in order to pay the tuition for Foote's two years at the Pasadena Playhouse, in California. After graduating, Foote moved to New York City, which became, he said, "my university." Between 1935 and 1942, supporting his acting habit with various odd jobs, including busboy, elevator operator, and bookstore clerk, Foote made the acting rounds, and also the social ones. "Horton, you're one of the few people New York seems to agree with," Tennessee Williams, another regional Young Turk who dreamed of changing the shape of commercial theatre, said.

Foote's optimism carried him through what he called "the sheer thing of survival, the sense of will-this-ever-end"; he was open, curious, charming, dili-

gent, and indefatigable. He welcomed the world, and, in due course, the artistic community welcomed him. Through a combination of hard work and good fortune, he found himself caught up in the slipstream of modernism. He befriended the dancers Jerome Robbins, Valerie Bettis, Doris Humphrey, Agnes de Mille, and Martha Graham. (Foote's fascination with dance—he wrote scenarios for Bettis and Graham—gave him an appreciation for the resonances of gesture, space, and body line.) As an actor, and then as a writer, he hooked up with Mary Hunter's American Actors Company, which was dedicated to developing regional voices and to cre-

ating an Off Broadway theatre movement. The company mounted Foote's "Texas Town," "Out of My House" (1942), and "Only the Heart" (1944). Crucially, more by accident than by intention, he also found his way into Method acting lessons with two recently arrived émigrés from Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, Andrius Jilinsky and Vera Soloviova, who taught that "to create truth on the stage, you must be acquainted with your own truth." (To Foote, this strategy became bedrock; throughout his life, he maintained an aesthetic of unvarnished narrative truthfulness.) By degrees, he came to know other Method acolytes, among

them Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Franchot Tone, Clifford Odets, Sanford Meisner, and Tennessee Williams.

Foote thought of Williams, who was eight years older, as "artistically my big brother." He followed his lead in rejecting the schematic ideological drama of the thirties and writing plays that embraced the personal instead. "We must remember that a new theatre is coming after the war with a completely new criticism, thank God," Williams wrote to Foote, adding, "All these people are going, going,—GONE!" Still, to a promiscuous bohemian pessimist like Williams, the sanguine, bushy-tailed Foote seemed positively square. "A pineapple ice-cream soda," he called Foote behind his back. "I regard Mr. Foote with a somewhat uncharitable reserve," Williams confided to his agent, Audrey Wood, in 1943. "Rivalry has something to do with it, I'm sure, but I find his great warmth and ingenuousness seeming a little spurious."

As writers, Williams and Foote were opposites. Williams was a hysteric who wanted to seduce the audience with the truth of his lament; Foote's plays bore witness to the emotional truth of history. Williams wrote out of a sense of absence, Foote out of a sense of fullness. Williams was a romantic who destroyed himself for meaning; Foote was a conservative who made meaning of the world he sought to preserve. In his story-telling, Williams was melodramatic and extravagant; Foote preferred a sly, understated simplicity. "I've tried to be more theatrical, more sensational. It's not my style," he said. "I admire Shakespeare greatly, and deeply love to read him, but his is not my favorite type of theatre. Often it embarrasses me and also I don't believe a lot of it." In Foote's plays, the big dramatic events happen offstage. Foote examined the ripple, not the wave. He was a quiet voice in noisy times.

Both Williams and Foote arrived on Broadway in the mid-forties. In the postwar boom, Americans were released from fifteen years of self-sacrifice to pursue their own destinies. Williams caught the shift in mood toward self-fulfillment; Foote did not. "The Glass Menagerie" (1945) pioneered a new psychological expressiveness on the American stage and made Williams a



"Brooklyn is the Manhattan of the other boroughs."

star; Foote's "Only the Heart" was panned by the critics ("talky, old-fashioned and dull," the *Times* called it) and closed after six weeks. For the next five years, Foote retreated to the King-Smith Studio School, in Washington, D.C., where he managed the theatre program, directed the modern repertoire, explored non-narrative forms of drama with Valerie Bettis, who was also in residence, and wrote four one-acts that were mounted at the school's theatre. In 1949, citing Treplev's judgment in "The Seagull"—"I'm coming more and more to the conclusion that it's a matter not of old forms and not of new forms, but that a man writes, not thinking at all of what form to choose, writes because it comes pouring out from his soul"—Foote returned to New York and to his Broadway ambitions.

Foote's plays "The Chase" (1952) and "The Trip to Bountiful" were staged in New York, but received little attention. Unlike the major playwrights of the period—Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge—he had no axe to grind, no moral posture to strike, no rebarbative wit to peddle, and none of the sensational theatrics that thrilled commercial audiences. Things happened in Foote's stories, but nobody was blowtorched, castrated, raped, eaten alive, or snowed in with a beautiful woman; nor did anyone commit suicide for the insurance money. Foote could not make a living or a reputation on Broadway.

With the arrival of television, in the early fifties, however, he found immediate success. Between 1952 and 1954, Foote wrote ten teleplays for the Philco Playhouse, which made his name. He became part of the legend of TV's Golden Age, the writer whose teleplays inspired Paddy Chayefsky to take up the form. The one-hour format eliminated the talkiness that had plagued Foote's early work, and the camera intensified the presence of his characters, whose situations lacked a certain visceral wallop on-stage. Television taught Foote the dynamics of dramatic characterization; the simplicity of his story lines now worked for him, not against him. And his work attracted an array of America's finest actors, including Lillian Gish, Pauline Lord, Jo Van Fleet, Kim Stanley, Gerald

dine Page, and, for the film version of "The Chase," Marlon Brando. Television brought Foote to a mass audience and created a market for his writing. He added the Goodyear Playhouse and the Gulf Playhouse to his list of employers. And when TV production shifted from New York to Los Angeles, in the late fifties, his success proved a calling card to movie producers and to screenwriting. For the next seven years, Foote shuttled back and forth between New York and Hollywood.

"Keep your ear to the ground and concentrate on honesty," Williams wrote to Foote in 1944. Throughout his career, Foote did just that. From the ordinary, he teased out a subtle song, which was at once true and tender. In his screen adaptation of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," for instance—"a work of such quiet and unobtrusive excellence that many people have commented the film's dialogue was lifted chapter and verse from the novel. This is simply not so," Lee wrote—the widower Atticus Finch sits on a porch swing after putting his two children to bed and overhears their conversation, and the loss beneath their words:

SCOUT: Jem?
JEM: Yes?
SCOUT: How old was I when Mama died?
JEM: Two.
SCOUT: And how old were you?
JEM: Six.
SCOUT: Old as I am now?
JEM: Uh-huh.
SCOUT: Was Mama pretty?
JEM: Uh-huh.
SCOUT: Was Mama nice?
JEM: Uh-huh.
SCOUT: Did you love her?
JEM: Yes.
SCOUT: Did I love her?
JEM: Yes.
SCOUT: Do you miss her?
JEM: Uh-huh.

Robert Duvall, who made his film-acting debut as Boo Radley, the subnormal next-door neighbor who saves the lives of Finch's children, and who appeared in six other Foote projects, including an Academy Award-winning performance as the fallen country singer Mac Sledge, in "Tender Mercies," compared Foote's dialogue to "sandpiper prints." "They're very delicate," he said. "It's very deep, very specific. His work you have to let lay there and find its own impetus."

Nowhere in Foote's canon is the cumulative momentum of the mundane more powerful than in "Tomorrow" (1972), Foote's inspired film adaptation (based on his 1968 stage version) of a 1940 Faulkner short story. A low-budget masterpiece, directed by Joseph Anthony, the movie flashes back from a murder trial that has ended with a hung jury, and is narrated by the defense lawyer, who can't fathom why one hold-out on the jury—a plainspoken Mississippi farm laborer named Jackson Fentry (Duvall)—wouldn't vote to acquit an upstanding rancher, H. T. Bookwright (Jeff Williams), who is accused of murdering a cattle thief and lowlife, Buck Thorpe, who was running off with his daughter. "He was not only no good, but dangerous," an exasperated juror says of Thorpe. "I can't help it," Fentry drawls politely. "I ain't gonna vote Bookwright free."

The story that unfolds in flashback—Sarah Eubanks, a pregnant woman, abandoned by her husband, lands on Fentry's doorstep; he takes her in and, as she is dying in childbirth, promises to care for her son, whom he then rears—is entirely Foote's invention. Thorpe, it turns out, was that boy, until he was stolen away by the brutal family of Sarah's husband. Foote's uncanny ability to expand another writer's narrative was an offshoot of his ability to listen. (Faulkner liked Foote's version so much that he shared his royalties with him.) In Faulkner's tale, Foote heard the themes of enduring suffering and enduring love, on which his own plays ruminated. "I've known people the world has thrown everything at . . . and yet something about them retains a dignity," Foote said. Fentry is a monument to this kind of stoic courage. At the finale, he rides away from the courthouse on his mule; the lawyer's voice-over follows him out of town and down a winding dirt road:

I could never have guessed Fentry's capacity for love. I suppose I figured that comin' where he came from, that even the comprehension of love had been lost out of him back down the generations where the first Fentry had to take his final choice between the pursuit of love and the pursuit of keepin' on breathin'. The lowly and invincible of the earth—to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Only the last sentence is from Faulk-



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—Cicero

ner's story; the rest stand as a testament to Foote's belief in the goodness of mankind.

Foote, who rebelled against the fire and brimstone of the Methodist preaching he grew up with, became a Christian Scientist in 1953. "I am deeply religious but I never write from that point of view," he said. "I don't proselytize." Foote believed that "spiritual values lead you to hunger for more spiritual values." The placid surfaces of his stories conceal an undertow of the eternal. Hymns frequently signal this immanence. In "The Trip to Bountiful," for instance, Carrie Watts's hymn-singing implies her spiritual restlessness and her longing for transcendence. "The Carpetbagger's Children," three Southern sisters' counterpointed monologues about their family legacy, ends with an elegiac performance of the hymn "The Clanging Bells of Time": "And we hush our breath to hear/ And we strain our eyes to see/ If the shores are drawing near/ Eternity! Eternity!"

In his own household, Foote often repeated the Christian Science axiom "Divine love always has met, and always will meet, every human need." He read the *Christian Science Quarterly* and did his Bible lessons every day. "I think it sustained him," his daughter Hallie said. "He felt that there was something bigger than he was out there, and he respected that. It encouraged him to follow his instincts rather than impose something on them." The constant flow of his work was evidence of his faith, which worked as an antidote "to being fearful or shut down," Hallie said. Foote himself gave God credit for his literary productivity: "That doesn't come from me—that is, I reflect qualities of God," he said. In an undogmatic way, his plays are more often than not demonstrations of spiritual grace; they try to trap a sense of the miraculous in the ordinary. In "Tender Mercies," for instance, the newly baptized Mac Sledge is saved from the hell of alcoholism and the waste of his life and talent by the love of a woman and her son, who literally and symbolically give him a new song. In "Bountiful," Carrie Watts tells the sheriff who takes her the last miles of her odyssey, "Before I leave this earth, I'd like to recover some of the dignity . . . the peace I used to know." She finds salvation not, as expected, in the land but in the journey. She can now re-

join her family and live out her days in harmony, instead of in resignation. That internal harmony also defined Foote; of his almost unnerving calm, Harper Lee said, "He's like God, only clean-shaven."

In "The Last of the Thorntons" (2000), a play about memory and history, set in an old-age home, a demented and intransigent resident, Annie, speaks only one line: "I want to go home. I want to go home," she says. The word "home" haunts the play, as it does Foote's oeuvre. Home, for Foote, is both secular and sacred; it is where you are known and remembered, where pain can be understood, where healing can take place. His characters may struggle within the framework of family; outside of it, however, they suffer a spiritual attrition. In "Convicts," for instance, the godless Soll Gautier, a paranoid and barbarous seventy-eight-year-old plantation owner who exploits the prisoners who work his fields, dies in hellish fear and isolation, unloved and unmourned by his family. "Don't leave me here alone, defenseless, to have my throat cut," he says not long before he dies.

In "Dividing the Estate," Foote's finest play, the avaricious members of the Gordon family, which is land rich and cash poor, are desperate to sell off their homestead and its five thousand acres to sustain themselves during the eighties oil recession. "I don't have all I need," the backbiting daughter Mary Jo says. "We owe money to everybody. We can lose our cars, our house." But the matriarch, Stella, doesn't want to sell; she reminds her children that her own family got through the Great Depression without selling their land. "Just look at what is surrounding us," she says. "Fruit markets and fast-food restaurants. That's what happens when you sell your land." When Stella dies, the prospect of a windfall lifts her children's bedraggled spirits. Lawyers are hired, heirlooms squabbled over, plans made. In the fractious hubbub of calculation, the spoiled Gordon clan learns of inheritance taxes, legal fees, declining land values, and debts; their million-dollar bonanza shrinks to a pittance, and probate forestalls any chance of cashing in for at least a year. They can't borrow on their inheritance; they need to take a bank loan on the property to pay off the estate taxes. The Gordons' only economic recourse, finally, is to move in together in the old house.

"Every night I'm going to pray. On bended knee—pray," Mary Jo says. "That we strike oil, so we can divide the estate."

Foote described the saga of the struggling hero of "The Orphans' Home Cycle," Horace Robedaux, as "the search of the dispossessed . . . seeking and finding a home." As a boy, Horace, like Foote's father, is cast out by his mother after his father dies. She moves to Houston with her new husband and young daughter, leaving Horace to live with his grandparents and more or less grow up by himself. "I am no orphan, but I think of myself as an orphan, belonging to no one but you," he tells his new bride in "Valentine's Day" (1980). "I intend to have everything I didn't have before. A house of my own, some land, a yard."

The cycle takes its name from Marianne Moore's poem "In Distrust of Merits": "The world's an orphans' home. Shall/we never have peace without sorrow?" The sorrow with which Foote contended was both his father's and his own. In life, Big Horton, a victim of parental neglect and misfortune, was possessive of his wife's attention and competitive with his three sons. Foote never felt that his father loved him enough. (Big Horton's favorite was his handsome second son, Tom, who had just got an acting contract with Warner Brothers when the Second World War broke out; Tom enlisted in the Air Force and was shot down over Germany in 1944.) "The Orphans' Home Cycle," according to Hallie, was her father's "way of trying to understand and forgive his father." The saga, however, ends on a note of uncertainty. "This is my home," Horace insists in the cycle's penultimate line. "Don't be so sure," his ne'er-do-well brother-in-law replies. "Don't be so sure about anything, Big Horace. Not about anything in this world." In the end, Big Horton, who became demented and lived with Foote for a time, didn't recognize his son. He actually uttered the punishing line that Foote used in "The Last of the Thorntons": "I want to go home."

Foote's own dispossession was not from family but from the New York theatre. Despite his popularity in Hollywood, by the mid-sixties he found his plays drowned out by the raucous, polemical atmosphere of the era. His simple regional stories were, once again, not the style of the moment. Many of his collaborators had died or had left the theatre scene; the

new generation of theatremakers didn't know his name. In 1965, with twenty thousand dollars, Foote bought fifty acres in New Boston, New Hampshire, and retreated to the wilderness. With four cats, two dogs, a Shetland pony, four children, and his wife, Lillian, he settled into a Revolutionary-era house on a dirt road to wait out the nation's trauma. Foote was no backwoodsman. He was not mechanical or athletic; he didn't cook or clean. "He didn't do anything," Hallie said. "He just wrote." In winter, he wrote in the attic, in summer in a hut nearby. It was a thin time. "I'd often talk of finding something else to do," he said. "Lillian was selling real estate and we both loved antiques. I'd say, 'Maybe I'll open an antiques shop.' She'd always say, 'Stick to the writing.'"

After the deaths of his father, in 1973, and his mother, in 1974, Foote slowly moved his family back to Wharton. It was there that he conceived the idea of his "Orphans' Home Cycle"—an epic endeavor that took him a decade to complete. He followed the cycle with the Academy Award-winning screenplay for "Tender Mercies." Foote's reemergence on the American scene in the early eighties was as sudden as his disappearance had been. The 1985 movie version of "The Trip to Bountiful" earned him another Academy Award nomination for best adapted screenplay, and Geraldine Page an Academy Award for best actress.

Foote went on writing until the end of his life. It was not his style, in life or in writing, to call attention to himself. As a result, the quality of his work is high; the public awareness of it is low. Because he broke no new artistic ground and staked no intellectual claims, he has only a minor place in American theatre history. But, within the limits of his compassionate vision, he was an expert storyteller, who achieved something that no other modern American playwright has: he had not only a second but a third act. At present, his screenplay "Main Street" is in production; "The Orphans' Home Cycle" is in performance; a biography, "Horton Foote: America's Storyteller," by Wilborn Hampton, has just been published; and *The Horton Foote Review: The Journal of the Horton Foote Society* continues to debate the issues and nuances of his oeuvre. "He had a gift and an ear," Hallie said. "There's a side of me that feels like that was a kind of a divine thing. He was lucky." ♦

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ON TELEVISION

SCREWED

Good wife, bad husband.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

In the opening shot of the CBS drama "The Good Wife," Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies) walks down a hallway, hand in hand with her husband, Peter (Chris Noth), to a press conference, at which he announces that he has resigned from his position as the state's attorney of Cook County (a.k.a. Chicago), in order to deal with a scandal that has legal and personal repercussions—he's been charged with using public funds to pay women for sex. This drama, which began in September, is based on a drama that began in March of 2008: Eliot Spitzer's resignation as the governor of New York after his own dealings with prostitutes became public. Actually, much of the drama of these dramas stems from the same scene: the sight of a wife being humiliated and dragged before the public, a public that is as fascinated as it is disgusted by the spectacle. The Spitzer tableau, in turn, replicated one from 2004—the press conference at which James McGreevey, then the governor of New Jersey, announced, with his wife at his side, that he was gay and planned to resign.

The scene echoes down the ages: the betrayed "good wife" standing by her man in public, somehow appearing to keep her head above the drowning waters of shame. (There does seem to be an embarrassment of echoes in recent times, though; during the premiere episode of "The Good Wife," on September 22nd, there was a promo for David Letterman's show that night. His guest was Bill Clinton. The resonances are almost absurd.) As much as was reported about what Spitzer had done, and as much discussion as there was about what should be done to him (in addition to violating any number of implicit compacts, he violated at least one explicit law), there seemed to be even more discussion—in print, on TV, at dinner parties—about how Mrs. Spitzer must feel and what she should do.

This is what "The Good Wife" explores, though there's more to the show than that; it doesn't hinge on headlines and it isn't restricted by what we can see from the outside—the merely poignant, infuriating, sad awfulness of it all. (Think, for starters, about how much more literally exposed wives are than their husbands in such scenes, standing full length before the slaving cameras while the offending men have the protection of lecterns.) "The Good Wife," which was created by Robert and Michelle King, a husband-and-wife team, depicts that pain, but also mines the complexities of Alicia's life once the cameras have moved on to the next scandal. Six months after her husband's resignation, he's in prison, and Alicia goes back to work as an attorney, having given up her career thirteen years earlier to tend to Peter and their two children. The cameras may have moved on, but Alicia remains a lightning rod for people's curiosity and is assumed to have some residue of entitlement from her days as the wife of a powerful man. Hers is not exactly a no-win situation, but it's close. And, starting over as a junior associate in her forties, she's competing for a permanent position with a much younger, slicker associate, Cary Agos (Matt Czuchy, who was Logan, Rory's college boyfriend, in "Gilmore Girls"), who's quicker with the whiz-bang technology of modern office life—before Alicia can look something up the old-fashioned way, on the computer, he's found the answer on his smartphone.

"The Good Wife" isn't saying that women can't "do it all," but neither is it saying that they can. Alicia has done one job well, managed her family life, but she has a lot of catching up to do in the professional realm. And she now relies on her mother-in-law, Jackie (Mary Beth Piel, whose respectable-matron appearance in this role reminded me, distractingly, of Jean Harris), to take care of her

children while she's at work. In the years that Alicia has been absent from the workforce, other women of her generation have risen to the top of the field; as it happens, it's a woman, Diane Lockhart (Christine Baranski), a name partner, who gives her a light grilling about what she's been doing with her life. Diane then tells Alicia to think of her as a mentor, saying that there's no equivalent of an old-boys' network—it will be “women helping women”—but in fact she doesn't have the time or the inclination to do any mentoring. So far, at least, through four episodes, “The Good Wife” hasn't posited Diane and Alicia as natural enemies; that's refreshing. Diane just happens to be a busy boss. She suggests rather breezily that Alicia can overcome what's happened to her, and, in an amusing touch, she motions to a framed picture of herself with Hillary Clinton, and says, “If she can do it, so can you.”

As for Peter, there's little he can do while in prison to repair the damage that he's inflicted on his family—if that's even possible. He is just one more thing that's dragging Alicia down, piling insult on top of injury. He says to Alicia, “Thanks for playing the breadwinner for a while,” and it's one of those throwaway lines that sting—his choice of words implies that she's dabbling, and that he'll resume the central role in their life sooner or later. And yet he's not just a bum of a husband; although he's no more curious about her feelings than he (evidently) was when he was seeing call girls, he gives her a tip on a case she's handling. He wants her to do well. The tip is unsolicited but undeniably helpful—and it puts Alicia in a gray ethical area of her own.

“The Good Wife” is pretty skillful at illuminating such shades of gray, the spectrum of compromise that plays out in law firms (and in office life in general). One of the senior partners, Will Gardner (Josh Charles, who hasn't been so well used since “Sports Night” ended, nine years ago), balks at taking a case brought by a stripper who claims that she was raped at a bachelor party, because, regardless of any merits the case may have, “it's got Duke lacrosse written all over it.” What he means isn't just that that real-life case was a bad one but that it drew irremediably bad publicity in the media; he's worried about appearances.

(CBS, apparently, isn't: an audio recording of Peter and one of his extramarital sex partners, Alicia discovers, is available on the Internet; the link to it, which we see twice, is cbsnews.com. At first, Alicia resists temptation. She doesn't want to hear it. But, of course, she also does want to hear it. And she eventually, and inevitably, clicks on the link. Yes, this

from an affluent suburb to an apartment in the city, and, by the end, has gained wisdom and acceptance. The new state's attorney is a little too pointedly depicted as Peter's, and now Alicia's, nemesis. But the intelligence and the subdued emotionalism of Margulies's performance lets you know that there is no neatness in Alicia's life. She doesn't always say much,



Julianna Margulies as a wronged woman turned legal eagle in “The Good Wife.”

show is a work of fiction, but, still, CBS here is both giving itself a plug and acknowledging its complicity in feeding people's need for dirt.) To illustrate that some kinds of compromise have an eternal usefulness, a colleague of Alicia's, Kallinda Sharma (Archie Panjaba), readying herself for a fact-finding mission for a case, good-naturedly undoes a button on her blouse in order to show some cleavage; it's her method for getting a man to give her the information that she's after. “These are better than subpoenas,” she says to Alicia.

There is occasionally too much neatness to “The Good Wife,” as in the episode in which Alicia's pre-teen daughter complains, at the beginning, about her new school and about having to move

and there's no edge to her words when she does. But in every situation you can feel what she's going through, and the sacrifices she's continually forced to make. To strengthen her husband's appeal, she's asked to testify that false statements he made were aimed not at covering up illegalities but at concealing an affair from her. The gall of this strategy registers only briefly on Alicia's face; the fact is that the plan is the most efficient one for her purposes, too—it could enable her children to have their father back. There won't be any catharsis, any revenge, sweet or otherwise, for Alicia, except in a courtroom, on behalf of her clients. But at least the next time she's in the spotlight it will be as a good lawyer, not a good wife. ♦

CAN'T STOP THE BEAT

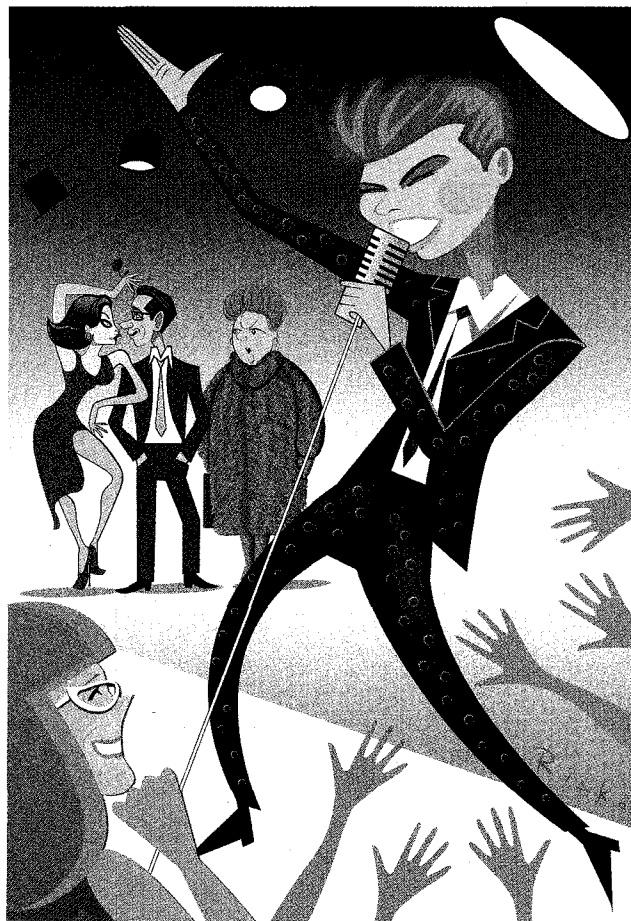
Scoring with rock and roll and hip-hop.

BY JOHN LAHR

Rock and roll first hit the airwaves in the mid-fifties, and it didn't take long for its creators to understand their ability to corrupt an audience with pleasure. "They're really rockin' in Boston/In Pittsburgh, P.A./Deep in the heart of Texas/And 'round Frisco Bay," Chuck Berry boasted in "Sweet Little Sixteen." The thrill of the new sound—the way it made our hearts race and ruffled the feathers of authority—is almost impossible to describe now. Rock captured and broadcast our rogue adolescent energy. It was galvanizing. When the ululating falsetto of Little Richard's "Good Golly Miss Molly" first played through the radio of the family Chevy, as we were driving back from a fishing trip in Canada, my father had to stop the car; he laughed until he cried. When Elvis made his mass-media debut on "The Ed Sullivan Show"—his notorious gyrations filmed only from the waist up—I fell off the family chaise longue with delight. The "doo-doo-wah"s and the "shoo-dooten-shoo-be-dah"s may have sounded like nonsense, but they spoke to the buoyant and vague horizons of our dreams. We were post-war middle-class white kids living in the slipstream of the greatest per-capita rise in income in the history of Western civilization; we were "teen-agers"—a term, coined in 1941, that was in common usage a decade later—a new, recognizable franchise. We had money, mobility, and problems all our own. Rock and roll was pitched directly to us and to our dawning sense of our own power. *A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop, a-wop-bam-boom!*

"Bye Bye Birdie" (now at the Henry

Miller, under the acrylic direction and choreography of Robert Longbottom), premièred in 1960, in a production that I saw. In 1957, "West Side Story" had introduced the musical to the reckless dark side of teen-age life; "Bye Bye Birdie," set in Sweet Apple, Ohio, where the citizens apparently dress mostly in chartreuse, mauve, orange, periwinkle,



Nolan Gerard Funk is a lug with looks in "Bye Bye Birdie."

and turquoise, was a walk on the bright side. In its celebration of fifties America, the musical was slyly nostalgic for an innocence already lost. It deftly appealed to and mocked American credulity, both satirizing and cashing in on the thrall of rock and roll and of Elvis in particular: like the singer, it shook things up. The legendary Kenneth Tynan was so

ravished by the musical's élan that he quite forgot his British reserve and, in these pages, pronounced its "affectionate freshness" something "seldom encountered since Rodgers collaborated with Mr. Hart on 'Babes in Arms.'" (The sole dissenting voice, the *Times*' Brooks Atkinson—"Neither fish, fowl nor good musical comedy," he wrote—retired a couple of months later.) Fifty years on, "Bye Bye Birdie" is still as light, frothy, and irresistible as an egg cream.

The plot revolves around Kim MacAfee, the recently pinned fifteen-year-old president of the fan club for the pop idol Conrad Birdie. She has been chosen by his record company—as a promotional ploy for his song "One Last Kiss"—to be the last person he kisses, on "The Ed Sullivan Show," before being inducted into the Army. Conrad (the excellent Nolan Gerard Funk) turns out to be a lug with looks. The musical asks the existential question: Will Kim stay true to her boyfriend and the ideal of monogamy, or will she fall for this pouting, pompadoured package of pulsating pelvic power and descend into a life of cigarettes and moral turpitude?

What's startling about this production of "Bye Bye Birdie" is not how much the times and the styles have changed since 1960—that's blood under the bridge—but how much the skill set for musicals has declined as the number of shows staged has decreased. The actors here are bright, but they don't know how to shine. Something ingenious and luxuriant—a certain sparkle and frivolity—has gone out of the culture and out of them. The actors involved in the on-again, off-again adult romance, for instance—John

Stamos as Albert Peterson, Conrad's manager, and Gina Gershon as his Latina secretary, Rose Alvarez—have no whiff of humor about them and therefore no amperage. (Dick Van Dyke and Chita Rivera originated the roles.) In the absence of idiosyncrasy or chemistry, Stamos and Gershon have only Charles Strouse's fetching melodies and

ROBERT RISKO

Lee Adams's cute lyrics to lift them up over the footlights. They make it work; they just don't make it memorable.

At least you can't accuse Jayne Houdyshell, who plays Mrs. Mae Peterson, Albert's fur-coated, manipulative mother, of being unmemorable. Houdyshell is a capacious woman, whose size may stem, in part, from the fact that her character is laden, in Michael Stewart's book, with every castrating-Jewish-mother stereotype known to man. The imperious Houdyshell looks like one of those double-chinned, double-wide dowagers from a Helen Hokinson cartoon; her comic silhouette trumps cliché. The ghost of another droll figure hovers over the show: Paul Lynde, who appeared as Kim's father in 1960. Mr. MacAfee is played here, in a broad, silly-walk version, by Bill Irwin. Torso tilted forward and legs akimbo, Irwin does his patented rooster strut around the stage. He sometimes seems to be appearing in his own play. As a comedian, Irwin never does it for me—he's too self-conscious; you can see him working—but the audience loves him. At the first-act finale, dressed as Abraham Lincoln, with an oversized stovepipe hat creeping down his face, he tries to upstage his daughter on "The Ed Sullivan Show." It's a moment of genuine and inspired slapstick.

The likable, wry score of "Bye Bye Birdie" is, finally, what remains evergreen: an anthem to an optimism that our uneasy society can hardly remember. The show has its share of lame lyrics ("Hand in hand we'll mosey/Me and little Rosie/We will be so cozy"), but most of the songs, like the well-staged "Baby, Talk to Me," a lonely lament that turns into a quartet, lay haunting claim to feelings that time doesn't change: "Talk to me/Baby, won't you talk to me?/I don't care what you say,/Baby, talk to me." Those who weren't born when "Bye Bye Birdie" was first performed won't recognize a world without cell phones and cynicism, and won't register some of the popular references of the day. No matter: they'll know a good time when they see it.

"Life's a ball if only you know it," Conrad sings. Traditional Broadway musicals (written primarily by middle-class white men) captured the twentieth century's sense of anticipation. The con-

temporary hip-hop sound captures the twenty-first century's sense of desperation. Full of ferocity and exploit, hip-hop is the rumble of the dispossessed world that the Broadway musical left out of its song.

"Watch me be an artist who was born ready-made," Lemon Andersen, a thirty-four-year-old half-Latino poet, performer, and actor, raps in his one-man show "County of Kings: The Beautiful Struggle" (at the Public, developed and directed by Elise Thoron). "Watch me take my lemons/and make the best goddam lemonade." In compelling and well-performed iambs, whose artfulness somehow takes the hurt out of the horror, Andersen evokes and enacts the barbarous Brooklyn of his youth: Millie, his loving mother and an addict who died of AIDS; Lily, his fifteen-year-old Dominican doll; Mookie, his crack-dealing cohort; his gun-toting days; his prison time. He paints a vivid word picture of the underclass and of his redemption from it. His discovery of books and of language, at a late age, was his way out.

Hip-hop revels in its own maimed self-sufficiency, its refusal to suffer. Andersen snaps off his rhymes like jabs: "Cocaine mixed with baking soda/The new payola"; "Millie's in the hospital/Chado's in jail/Medicaid covers medicine/but it don't post bail." Inevitably, for someone who has unexpectedly found a voice and a way to be heard, Andersen's idiom spills out in torrents. It reminded me of the Watts Towers, in Los Angeles—an edifice of scraps, but all the more extraordinary for its defiant accomplishment. Although Andersen's humor and his courage insure that he never wears out his welcome, the two-hour celebration of his survival would have more clout if it were shorter. He holds our attention so confidently partly because, when she was alive, he held his mother's. He keeps the memory of her with him and recounts it at the beginning and at the end of the show. He recalls the excitement of being watched by her at the age of ten, as he glided and shimmied on the dance floor. "I could hear her pitch perfect in the background yelling/'That's my boy!'" Andersen says. He's older now, but he's still someone to watch. ♦

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TROUBLE IN EDEN

"Antichrist."

BY ANTHONY LANE

It would be a shock if "Antichrist" had turned out to be anything but shocking. After all, the giving of offense has long been the stock-in-trade of its writer and director, Lars von Trier, the man who brought us "Breaking the Waves," "The Idiots," and "Dogville." This year, the new film was jeered to the rafters at the Cannes Film Festival, although the energetic snagging of attention is as hallowed a Cannes custom as the hiking of prices in the local seafood joints. Better by far to see the movie now, and thus to establish, under less seething conditions, if the provocation was indeed a mere flourish of perverse P.R., or whether it remains an essential part of some more solemn design.

We begin at the deep end, with copulation and death. An unnamed man, listed in the credits only as He (Willem Dafoe), and his wife, otherwise known as She (Charlotte Gainsbourg), are in the bathroom of their family home, busy doing It. This is a rapturous occasion, shot in glittering monochrome, featuring slow-motion closeups of the conjugal act, and stirred by the dolorous strains of a Handel aria. "May sorrow break these chains of my sufferings, for pity's sake," the libretto tells us: a curious invocation—we expect joy, not sorrow, to perform that task—and one that von Trier is only too eager to obey, closing the sequence with the orgasm of the adults and, simultaneously, the fatal fall of their young son, who climbs to a window and drops into the snow-thickened night. Because their attention was distracted by desire, their grief will be compounded and crazed by guilt.

At this point, we shift into color, although anyone expecting the director of photography, Anthony Dod Mantle, to revisit the hot hues of his previous film, "Slumdog Millionaire," will be disappointed. "Antichrist" is set in Seattle and the wilds of the Northwest, as far from Mumbai as can be imagined, and the glum interiors—the bathroom where the couple made love is now a scummy blue—com-

pete for desolation with the great outdoors. Our first hint that the natural world will be a wellspring not of pastoral ease but of mystification and threat comes at the heroine's bedside, in a clinic; she lies there, leaden with loss, while the camera closes in on the stalks of a well-wisher's flowers in a vase next to her—rotting stumps of green, in a swirling murk. Her husband, a psy-

limitations of the shrink. There are more things in heaven and earth, the film suggests, than are dream'd of in our psychology, and there is true venom in the wife's voice when she says to her spouse, "I never interested you till now. Now I'm your patient." What is more, the savagery that has earned the film its noisome reputation begins only after she has announced, "I'm cured, I'm fine." Civilizing science, in other words, has done its duty and withdrawn, allowing the bestial—that part of humanity which lies beyond the reach of reason—to emerge and flex its jaws.

By this time, He and She are in Eden, their secluded shack in the countryside. Call me fanciful, but I *think* the name is on the loaded side, for it is here that the fall of man and the collapse of woman take



Charlotte Gainsbourg and Willem Dafoe in Lars von Trier's new movie.

chologist, takes her home and tells her not to dodge her distress but to meet it face to face. "Will it get worse?" she asks. "Yes, it will," he replies. He asks her to nominate the place where she is most afraid. "The woods," she says, and so into the woods, for the rest of the film, they go.

"Antichrist," whose title I don't claim to understand, is split into chapters, with headings like "Despair (Gynocides)" and "Pain (Chaos Reigns)." It would be hard to prove that these mean much, or refer to any cogent structure in the film. At best, they are a mocking mirror of the steps undertaken in therapy, and one thing that rises from "Antichrist" is a disdain for the

place, and where the landscape, its trees as lopped and blasted as those on a battlefield, looks anything but prelapsarian. A fox lies bleeding in the long grass, which rustles like the suburban lawn at the start of "Blue Velvet"; a startled doe runs off with a half-born fawn still swinging from her rump; a chick, splayed on the ground but not yet dead, swarms with marauding ants. The humans, too, are under siege: first from acorns that rifle onto the roof like bullets and from weird spores—is that what they are?—that smother the man's hand when he wakes in the morning, and, second, from each other. For every promise of affection, there is a snap of

ANDY REIFMAN

wrath, and the woman who declares, "I love you, darling," is the same person who, not long after, fetches a drill to bore a hole in her beloved's leg, plus a pair of scissors for herself. If you have eyes, prepare to shut them now.

A word to the squeamish: there is no shame in leaving as the tools—and I use the word advisedly—come out. In a way, you will be getting the best of "Antichrist," which until now has been a film of awkwardness, confusion, and great beauty. I see no reason to ally oneself wholeheartedly either with those who despise von Trier for his horrific silliness or with those who revere his ambition. Both have a point, and the problem is that von Trier, even at his most objectionable, can summon a wealth of images that defy explanation. I am thinking of the forest, at night, and the couple, unclothed and entangled, amidst the gnarled roots of a tree, with white hands sprouting from the earth as if to drag them down; or of the woman alone there, pleasuring herself in a kind of fury, with the man—and his paltry pleasures—no longer required.

At Cannes, the film received two prizes: one for Charlotte Gainsbourg, as Best Actress, and a scornful anti-trophy for von Trier, awarded for misogyny by the Ecumenical Jury. How the two should be squared I am unsure. The movie certainly shudders with a terror of female power, and the last thing we see is a monstrous regiment of women, their faces blanked out, streaming up a hillside, like the nightmare of a Puritan preacher. Yet so plain is Gainsbourg's dramatic dominance, as opposed to her place in von Trier's mad ideological

scheme, that she carries the tale with a conviction barely hinted at in the script. Dafoe is game but wearily baffled, as if he were only just realizing what he signed up for, and how it adds to his list of screen punishments: first he had hot wax dripped onto his sternum by Madonna, in "Body of Evidence," then he suffered the intense humiliation of being beaten up by Tobey Maguire, in "Spider-Man," and now he has a log being used as a battering ram on his private parts. Even Madonna would have frowned at that.

The worst aspect of the violence here is not so much its methodical nastiness, or even its taint of exhibitionism ("Gaze upon this, if you dare," von Trier seems to say), as the way in which it debases the milder but more serious acts of aggression in the earlier scenes. The couple's lovemaking, after the child's demise, has an edge of extremity that is both upsetting—the woman bites the man, and later asks him to hit her—and dangerously credible. To my eyes, this is the one area in which "Antichrist," so often ridiculous, makes sense: as a study of the kinship between loss and lust. Few subjects are trickier to approach. A. D. Nuttall, in "Shakespeare the Thinker," published posthumously in 2007, argues that when the newly widowed Lady Anne, in "Richard III," yields to the advances of the disfigured hero she is "compliant not so much in spite of her bereavement as because of it." Then, there is Gerald, in D. H. Lawrence's "Women in Love," stealing into Gudrun's bedroom three days after his father's funeral: "into her he poured all his pent-up darkness and corrosive death, and he was whole again." Some hope. Cinema has given us the

married couple, stricken by their daughter's drowning, in "Don't Look Now," who can still take an audience aback with the urgency of their grappling (might they be trying for another child?), and Nanni Moretti, in this year's "Quiet Chaos," who is numbed by the passing of his wife at the start of the film, but who jolts himself awake toward the end, with a strenuous bout. In each case, the equation is simple: the pulse of life, felt most strongly in sex, is greater than the terrifying zero of death.

The same applies to "Antichrist," with a twist: it was sex that led to death in the first place. That's why the movie is so self-involved, and leaves you fighting for breath, and why I believe von Trier when he describes the whole thing as a "dream film." That would account for the want of logic, for the claustrophobia, and for the incantatory manner in which details loop round and recur. I can no more rid myself of the memory of the wife, in a glowing white dress, crossing a moonlit bridge, than I can of Arthur Rackham drawings in a book of fairy tales from my childhood. I feel the same way about the fox in the film; without warning, it speaks, and most people giggle at the sound, but we accept something similar in "Peter and the Wolf," so why the derision here, since von Trier is clearly carving out a fable? Maybe that should be his next challenge: a PG rating. Skip the mutilation, stay in the woods, and make as strange a film as possible for kids. We can take it. ♦

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VOLUME LXXXV, NO. 34, October 26, 2009. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 9 & 16, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, August 10 & 17, and December 21 & 28) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Elizabeth Hughes, vice-president and publisher; Beth Lusk, associate publisher advertising; Anjali Saigal, associate publisher marketing services; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jennifer Graham, senior vice-president-finance; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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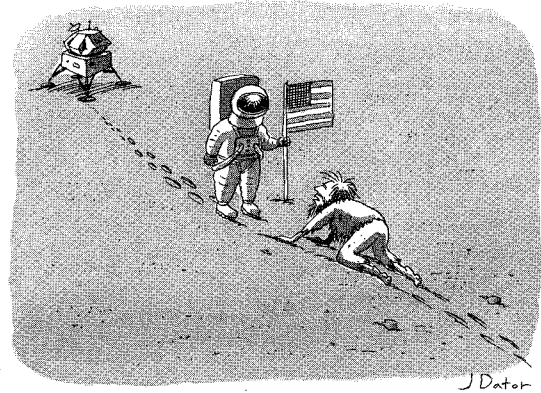
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Zachary Kanin, must be received by Sunday, October 25th. The finalists in the October 12th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 9th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



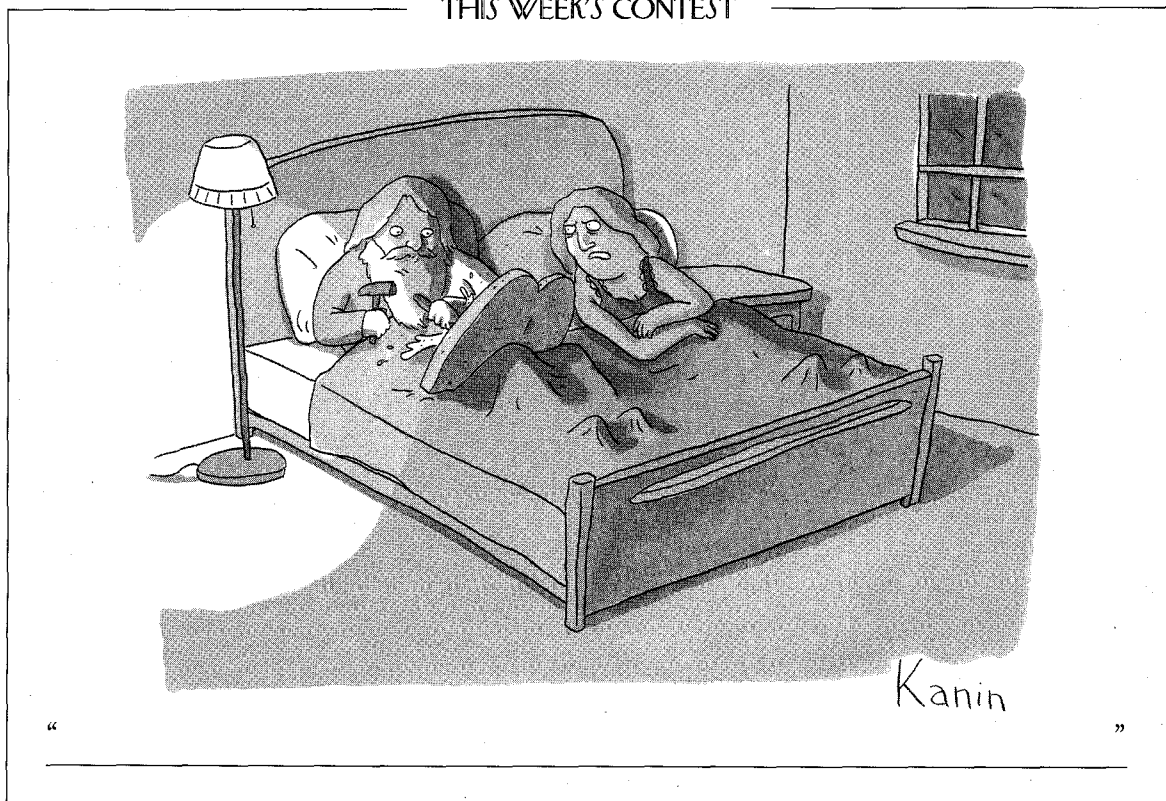
THE FINALISTS

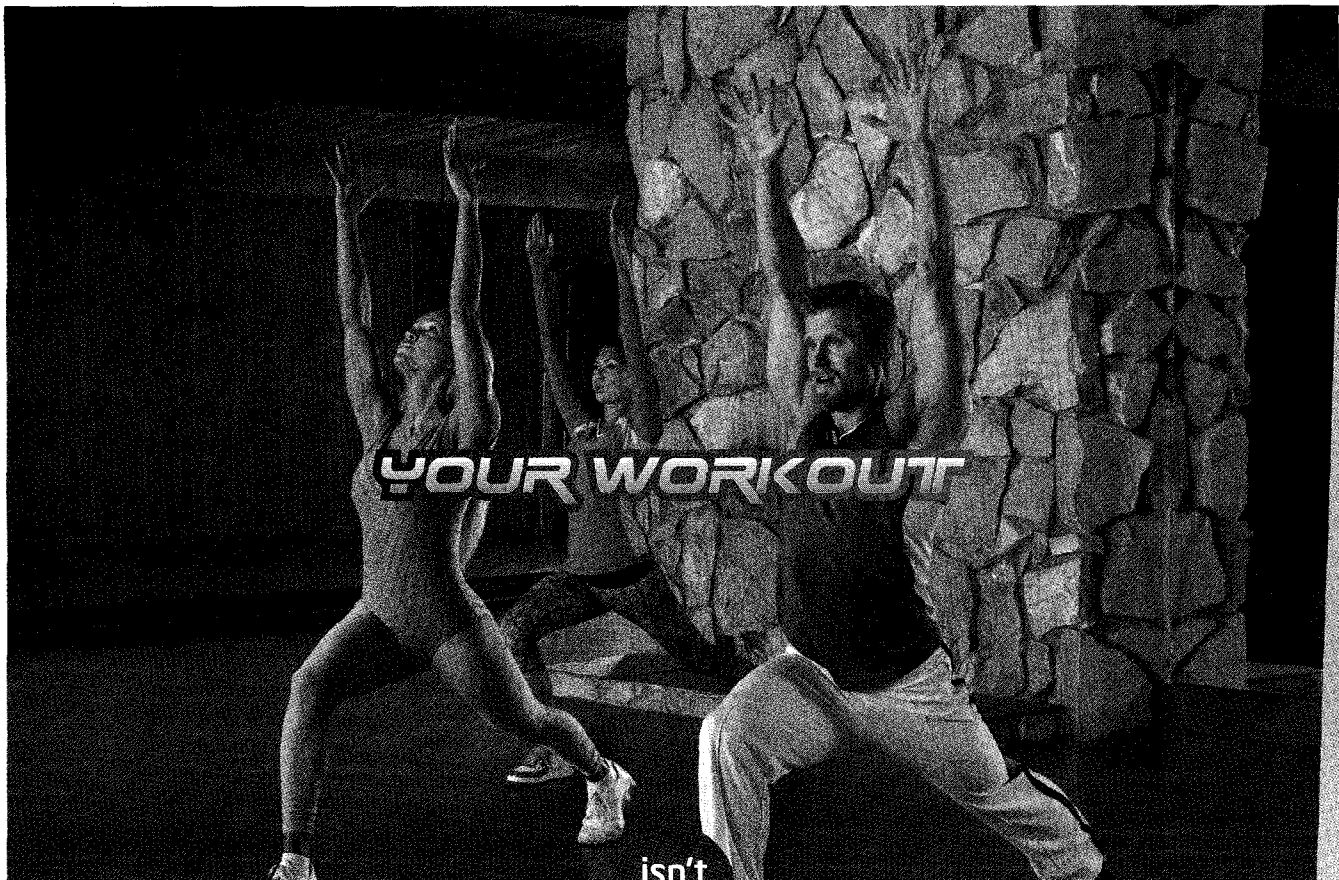
“You border patrol are good.”
Daniel Fine, Brooklyn, N.Y.

“One of us is in the wrong movie.”
Michael Jerald, Brattleboro, Vt.

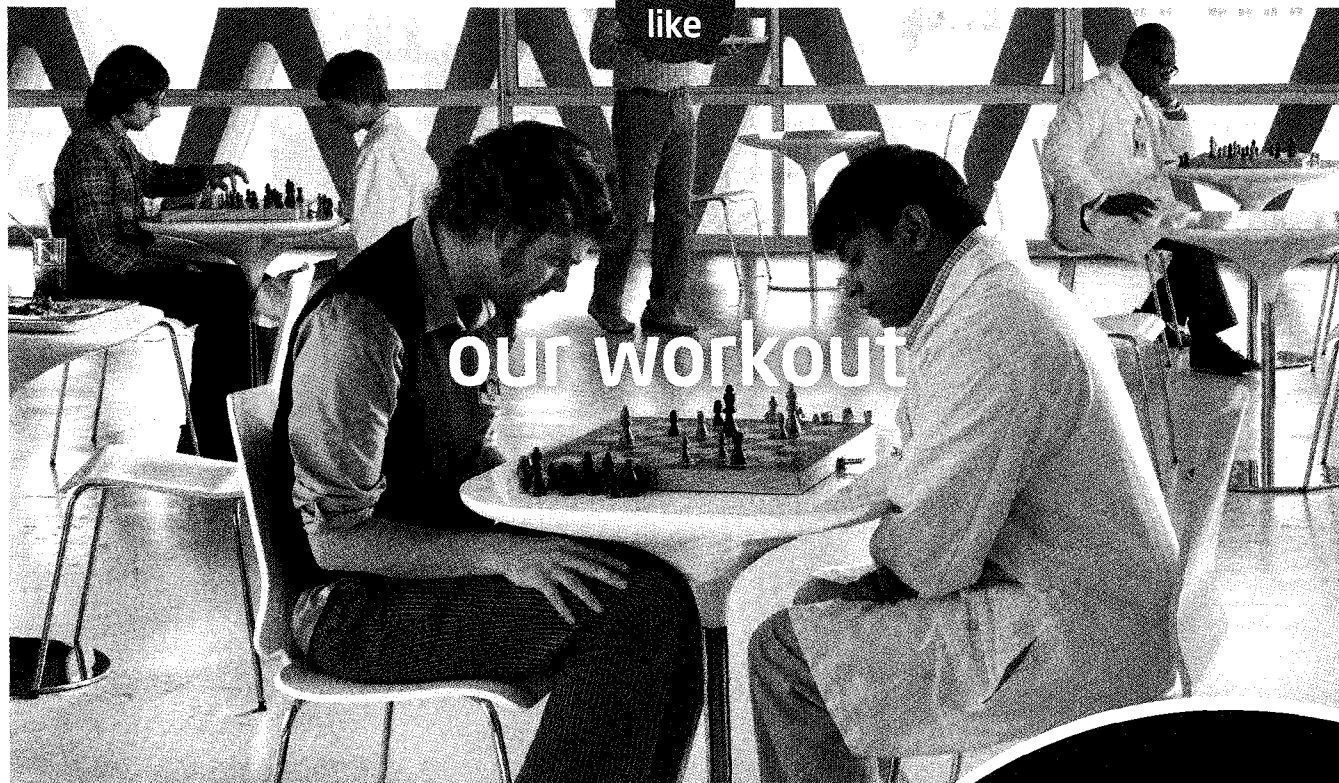
“Got anything besides Tang?”
Mike Tuohy, Buford, Ga.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST





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like



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